

Supported living

Key features of supported living are:

Separating housing and support The agency that provides or co-ordinates supports is not the landlord, nor does it have any organisational connection to the property owner.

Focusing on one person at a time A process of person-centred planning is used to find out what each person wants, and then to plan individually and assist them to secure the accommodation and supports that are right for them.

Full user choice and control Individuals choose where they live, with whom (if anyone), who supports them and how. Individuals hold their own tenancy, or mortgage, and are in control of their own money and household.

Rejecting no-one There is an assumption that everyone can live in the community. Just because someone has complex needs does not mean they should be denied the opportunity to lead the lifestyle of their choice. Attention is given to environmental adaptations and personally designed supports.

Focusing on relationships; making use of informal supports and community resources The approach builds upon a person's existing relationships and connections. Paid help is only used when natural and informal supports are not available. Paid supporters work to develop a person's social network.

Group homes

Group homes have served to enable us to learn a lot about enabling people to live outside of institutions. Using them as a standard package we have been able to resettle over 2000 people from hospitals and hostels in Greater Manchester and Lancashire over the past ten years. However, we have come to appreciate that group homes are not the last word in ordinary living.

The biggest problem is that many people living in group homes do not get on with the people they live with. Compatibility cannot be predicted accurately. People change. Trying to respond to individual needs while there are competing demands from other members of a household is often not easy.

Organisations have tried rearrangements but are often worried about the cost implications of leaving a 'vacancy' in a household. Despite the rhetoric about choice, many services have not yet found ways to listen carefully to what users are saying and responding effectively.

The supported living movement is encouraging us to explore a variety of ways of individualising support arrangements which don't necessarily rely on paid services. This will require services to be far more flexible in their use of resources. Custom and practice, rules and regulations, conditions of service and service cultures will all have to change if we are serious about our desire to support ordinary living.

Costs

Supported living arrangements are generally no more expensive than group homes and congregate living. Often they cost less. Surprisingly, costs can be lower for people with the greatest support needs. This is counter intuitive and challenges the traditional arguments about economies of scale. It can no longer be argued that we will have to put the clock back and gather people in eights and twelves, and even more, under one roof.

To illustrate. A person decides to invite someone without disabilities to live with her as a flat mate. The flat mate might live there rent free. Night staff are not needed which means a substantial saving in staff costs.

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23 May 1994

NWTDT Briefings are published by the North West Training & Development Team, Calderstones, Whalley, Clitheroe, BB7 9PE. ☎ 01254 821334.

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