

*Independence is about choice and control.
It is not about going it alone.*



We all have the right to decide where we want to live and who we want to live with, regardless of need. Some of us might need a bit of support to make those decisions, but it doesn't mean we are any less entitled to make them.

CHANGE are an international human rights organisation who have worked for the equal rights of people with learning disabilities for the past 23 years. We want to break down the barriers faced by people with learning disabilities and/or Autism and get rid of the stereotypes. Our talented staff are recruited because of their skills and expertise, regardless of their support needs. People with learning disabilities and/or Autism are employed on an equal salary to their non-disabled peers, which reflects their skills and dedication to improving the lives of others.

We create accessible information which is co-developed by our accessible design team and a group of experts with learning disabilities. We also deliver user-led training, grant funded projects and run campaigns – all towards a more inclusive and empowering society for people with learning disabilities.

Independent living and equal status within the community is very important to us at CHANGE. We believe that no matter where you live, who you live with, or what support you need, everyone should have choice and control of their lives. Here, three members of staff and volunteers at CHANGE discuss why being independent is so important to them.



SARAH JAMES
Project Worker

Sarah is 25 and has been living independently for the past two years in her own house, with a support worker three times per week.

When I was living at home with my dad I felt like I could not make my own choices and my dad would do everything for me. He did this as he thought it was easier to do this but I was not really learning to do things for myself which I wanted to do. One day I thought to myself this has to change as I was not happy and was getting angry because my dad was taking over.

I knew I needed help so I went looking for a support worker to help me with this. The first time we met we sat down and she asked me what my future goals were. This was the first time anyone had asked me this and for the first time I felt like I was being listened to and heard. I told her one of my main goals was to be living independently in my own home but I told her I didn't think that I could do this. She was the first person to believe in me that I could do this with her support and she talked me through and got me information on the options available to me she told me it was my choice and to think about what I want. We started bidding on council houses but then they told me to stay at home because I am not a high risk.

I was not happy to do this so I decided to look into private housing. My support worker got me some information on this and I found looking for a house very stressful as no one wanted to rent to be because of my disability.

There was also a lot for paperwork and payments to make and sometimes they didn't explain things in way that I understand.

It took me months to find someone who would rent a house to me and when this did happen the rent was put up and I was made to pay a year's rent in advance as she didn't think I could pay rent because of my disability. It can be overwhelming living by myself sometimes as it was a big change for me to get use to but I feel like I have grown as a person and I am now making my own choices and more independent.

Having independence helps me feel in control of my life and that I am making my own choices and not other people making them for me. I have also learned a lot for new skills e.g. using the washing machine and paying bills, also budgeting.

Having a paid job makes my confidence grow as I am earning my own money and I feel like even though I have a disability I can still earn a good wage on the same pay as someone without a disability which makes me feel proud.

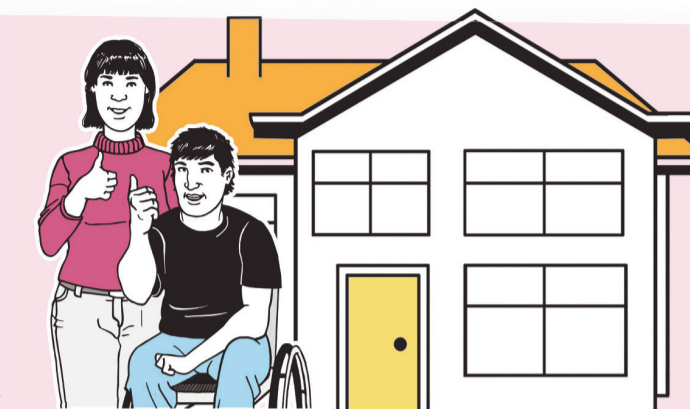
A lot of people don't know what help and support is available out there to get the support they need to live independently and there should be more help and support with helping people move out of home for the first time. As a lot of people feel nervous about this.



KENNETH FLETCHER
Volunteer

After I left home I lived in supported living with three other girls. I didn't enjoy it, the staff didn't understand my needs and I didn't have anyone that was a similar age to me to do things with. I didn't know how to travel independently and so I found myself stuck at home a lot. I am now in another supported living placement with two others, I find it really difficult as I don't get on with my housemate. Just because we both have a learning disability doesn't mean we are right to live with each other. In any supported living placement they just seem to be bothered about filling rooms and not putting people together who are compatible.

At the end of the day it is my home, I should feel comfortable in it. I often feel ill because I am so stressed and I forget to eat. I need support to remind me of things like that and help me be more independent. Everyone should have the right to choose who they live with, people with learning disabilities often don't get that choice, why should it be any different for us?



Independent living is important to me, it can make me a happier person and I can choose what I want to do and when. There's independent living with support and then there is leaving people to cope by themselves. Some people need support to be independent and leaving them without any at all can have the opposite effect. For me it is independent on the support workers terms, if I want to go out or do things, it has to be at a time that suits them not me. If I want to cook a meal I often have to wait for them to fill in paper work before they can help me to cook! Paperwork shouldn't come before the individual's support.

I am planning to move into my own home with support before Christmas. I am on a personal budget so I can choose my own staff and they will all be car drivers so I can do what I want when I want. To be independent I need carers who understand my disability and know me, who let me be independent but help me when I need it. Everyone needs help sometimes to live their lives.



JANE MOODY
Volunteer

I have lived in a care home for 20 years. There are 12 people living in my home. I enjoy living in my home, I have lots of choices. If I want to go out to the pub or Christmas shopping for example, staff are always happy to take me out. We interview for the staff in the home, all of the residents have that choice. People sometimes forget that the care home is my home, it's not an office for paperwork and I want to feel relaxed there.

It's important to me that I have that choice. It's my life, it's not anyone else's. I want to do what makes me happy. As well as working for CHANGE, I teach First Aid, I also write poetry which has been published and I perform my creative writing. It's important to me that I can express my feelings and also help other people, as well as myself, it helps me to have a voice.



It is important that people in care have their voices heard. Commissioners and service providers need to listen to people, rather than filling out forms. It would be really boring if everyone did the same thing. It doesn't matter what a person's needs are, they all have their own interests and they should be listened to and respected, as well making sure their needs are met.

Needs are only part of the person, we have wants too, this is what makes us who we are.