A Place to Live

We think too few people (less than one in seven) live on their own or with a partner. Too many young people still live with their parents and too many older people live in supported accommodation. Living independently makes many choices possible but, just like everyone else, people with learning difficulties worry about safety in the area they live in. We don’t think this should stop people living independently. They should have the choice of being independent and safe.

We were not surprised that so many people’s privacy was not respected and that most people in supported accommodation did not have a choice about who they lived with and where. As people with learning difficulties the right to have choice about a place to live and to privacy are very important.

Ian Davies & Karen Spencer

We asked people about where they lived and who they lived with.

Just over two in three people (69%) were living in private households. This means that they were living alone, with a partner or with their parents or other relatives. Just under one in three people (31%) were living in some form of supported accommodation.

Of the people living in private households:

- nearly three out of four people (73%) were living with their parent(s)
- one in six (17%) were living with other relatives
- just over one in twenty (6%) were living on their own
- just under one in twenty (4%) were living with a partner

Of the people living in supported accommodation:

- nearly two out of three (62%) were living in residential care homes
- one in three (34%) were being supported under the Supporting People programme
- the rest (3%) were living in NHS hospitals.

These results are summarised in Figure 3. The living arrangements for people with learning difficulties were very different from the living arrangements for adults in
the UK in general. In Figures 4 and 5 we have made some comparisons between the two using information on the general population for 2003/4 reported by National Statistics.\(^8\)

**Figure 4: Percentage of Adults Living Alone or Living as a Couple**
These figures show that people with learning difficulties are much more likely to live with their parents than other people (especially as they get older). They also show that people with learning difficulties are much less likely to live as a couple than other people.

Of the people with learning difficulties living with their parents, one in five (20%) were living with parents who were 65 or older. Nearly one in ten (9%) were living with parents who were 75 or older.

Who Is More Likely to Live in Supported Accommodation?

First, however, we looked at who was more likely to live in private households and who was more likely to live in supported accommodation. We found that five things were independently related to living in supported accommodation.
This means that each of these things was important, even when we took into account the other four things in the list.9

People were more likely to live in supported accommodation if (in order of importance) they

- were older
- had higher support needs
- were not Asian
- did not have poor general health
- did not have a long-standing illness or disability

Age

Older people were more likely to be living in supported accommodation than younger people. Figure 6 shows (for different ages) how likely it was that the people who took part in our survey lived in supported accommodation. It also shows similar information about the living situation of 15,000 people with learning difficulties in England in 2004.10
The figure shows that as people get older they are much more likely to live in some form of supported accommodation. It also shows that at each age the people who took part in our survey were a bit less likely to live in supported accommodation than people who are known to learning disability services.

**Support Needs**

People with higher support needs were more likely to be living in supported accommodation than people with lower support needs.

We divided the people who we interviewed into three equal groups based on the level of support they needed. One in four (25%) people with the lowest support needs were living in supported accommodation. Over one in three (40%) people with the highest support needs were living in supported accommodation. It is important to remember,
however, that the majority of people with the highest support needs were living in private households.

**Ethnicity**

Many fewer Asian people were living in supported accommodation than White people or Black people. However, this difference was only true for younger people.

- When we just looked at people under 40, many fewer Asian people were living in supported accommodation (7%) than White people (17%) or Black people (24%).
- When we looked at people who were 40 or older, there was little difference between the percentage of Asian people living in supported accommodation (46%) and White people (51%). (There were very few Black people in this age group.)

This difference in use of supported accommodation is surprising as Asian people tended to have higher support needs than other groups.

**Health & Disability**

When the effects of age, support needs and ethnicity were taken into account, people who either had generally poor health or had a long-standing illness or disability were less likely to live in supported accommodation.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of people living in private households and supported accommodation who had poor health or had a long-standing illness or disability.
In the next two sections we will summarise the information we collected. First, we will do this for people living in private households (people living with their families, a partner or alone). Then we will do this for people living in supported accommodation (people living in supported living, group homes, hostels and hospitals).

People Living in Private Households

Just over two in three people (69%) were living in private households.
Did People Like Where They Were Living?

We asked people whether they liked where they were living. It is very difficult to know whether someone else really likes something. Because of this we looked separately at what people with learning difficulties said themselves, and what the support person said when they answered for people with learning difficulties.

- Nearly all people with learning difficulties who were living with their parents (97%) or with other relatives (91%) said they liked where they lived. Most people who were living alone (78%) or with a partner (72%) also said they liked where they lived.
- When the support person answered these questions on behalf of the people with learning difficulties, they also said that nearly all people who were living with their parents (97%) or with other relatives (98%) liked where they lived. Support people very rarely answered these questions when people were living alone or with partners.

We looked in more detail at what people with learning difficulties said when they were interviewed alone compared to when they were interviewed with a support person present.

- People were just as likely to say that they liked living with their parents when interviewed alone (98%) as they were when interviewed with a support person present (97%).
- There was also not much difference between what people said about whether they liked living with their partner when interviewed alone (74%) or when they were when interviewed with a support person present (67%).
When people were living with other relatives, they were more likely to say that they liked where they lived when a support person was present (96%) than when they were interviewed alone (81%).

When people were living alone, they were also more likely to say that they liked where they lived when a support person was present (100%) than when they were interviewed alone (72%).

If people said they did not like where they lived, we asked them why. The answers to these questions are shown in Figure 8, separately for when the question was answered by the people with learning difficulties and when it was answered by the support person.

This figure shows that we got very different answers to this question depending on who answered.

- People with learning difficulties were most concerned about the area they were living in.
- Support people were most concerned about how independent people could be.

These differences may reflect the different views of people with learning difficulties and support people. They may also reflect what matters most to people with different levels of support need (people with low support needs answered themselves, the support person tended to answer for people with high support needs).
When a support person was present we asked them whether they thought the house was suitable for the person in light of their needs.

- Most support people (91%) did think the person’s accommodation was suitable.
- The main things that they complained about were the person needing more space (26% of people who

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Figure 8: What People Did Not Like About Where They Were Living
thought the accommodation unsuitable), having difficulty with stairs (20%), needing their own room (19%), needing a bedroom or bathroom downstairs (19%) and the general state of repair (8%).

**Feeling Safe**

We asked people about whether they felt safe at home at night and felt safe in the local area.

- A few people (5%) living in private households did not feel safe in their home at night. One in seven people (14%) said that they did not feel safe in the local area.
- When we just looked at what people with learning difficulties said themselves, one in six (17%) said they did not feel safe in the local area.

**Support At Home**

We asked whether people living in private households had someone to help them at home. Four out of five (80%) people said they did have someone to help them.

- In nearly all cases (93%) the person who provided support was a relative.
- A small number of people (8%) had a paid support person to help them at home.
- A few (2%) had a friend to help them at home.
- Of the people who did not have anyone to help them, a few (12%) said they would like someone.
Privacy

We asked people about their privacy.

- In a few cases (8%) people said that someone sometimes comes into their home without asking, or when they did not want them to.
- More people (14%) said that someone sometimes comes into their room without asking, or when they did not want them to. They said this was most likely to be someone they lived with (59% of those who said this happened), a relative or friend they didn’t live with (39%) or a paid support worker (8%).
- Most people said they could be alone with people who come to visit them (82%) and that they could be alone as much as they liked (86%).
- Just over one in four people (27%) said that sometimes people opened their letters without asking them.

People Living in Supported Accommodation

Just under one in three people (31%) were living in some form of supported accommodation.

The number of other people with learning difficulties that shared the person’s home is shown in Figure 9. Three in four (75%) people were living in houses for four or more people. Just under one in four (22%) were living in houses for more than 10 people.
We asked people in supported accommodation about the choice people had over who they lived with and where they lived.

- Two in three people (67%) said they had no choice (or were reported to have no choice) over who they lived with.
- Just over half the people (54%) said they had no choice (or were reported to have no choice) over where they lived.

We also looked at choice just for those people who answered most of the questions in the survey themselves. Even among this group of people who could do lots of things themselves, most people (58%) said they had no choice over
who they lived with. Though most of them (63%) said they did have some choice over where they lived.

When we studied all the answers to the questions we decided that people did not have enough choice if they had no choice over either who they lived with or where they lived. Overall, we found that two out of three people (64%) in supported accommodation did not have enough choice.

Next we looked at whether some people were more likely to have choice than others. Two things were strongly related to having more choice: living with fewer people and having lower support needs.

**Did People Like Where They Were Living?**

We asked people whether they liked where they were living. Because it is very difficult to know whether someone else really likes something we looked separately at what people with learning difficulties said themselves, and what support people said.

Most people with learning difficulties who were living in supported accommodation (93%) said they liked where they lived. When the support person answered this question, they also said that most people with learning difficulties who were living in supported accommodation (96%) liked where they lived.

If people said they were unhappy about where they lived, we asked them about why they were unhappy.
The answers to these questions are shown in Figure 10 separately for when the question was answered by the people with learning difficulties and when it was answered by the support person.

There were no really big differences between people with learning difficulties and support people. Not liking the area in which the person was living was the most common reason for not being happy with where people were living.

When a support person was present we asked them whether they thought the house was suitable for the person in light of their needs.
Most support people (94%) did think the person’s accommodation was suitable.
The main things that they complained about were the person needing more space (32% of people who thought the accommodation unsuitable), needing a bedroom or bathroom downstairs (17%), having difficulty with stairs (16%), needing their own room (11%) and the general state of repair (3%).

**Feeling Safe**

We also asked people about whether they felt safe at home at night and felt safe in the local area. A few people (3%) living in supported accommodation did not feel safe in their home at night. A few more (6%) did not feel safe in the local area. When the person with learning difficulties answered this question nearly one in ten (9%) said that they did not feel safe in the local area.

**Sharing & House Rules**

We asked people in supported accommodation about whether they had to share rooms (e.g., bathrooms) and about any house rules. We also asked them about how happy they were about sharing.

- Most people in supported accommodation had to share a bathroom (82%) and a kitchen (85%).
- People said that two out of three homes had some kind of house rules (66%).

Most people with learning difficulties said they were happy about sharing a bathroom (84%), sharing a kitchen (93%)
and the house rules (91%). When these questions were answered by a support person, they also said that the person with learning difficulties was happy about sharing a bathroom (90%), sharing a kitchen (95%) and the house rules (94%).

Privacy

We asked people about their privacy.

- Nearly one in six people (15%) said that someone sometimes comes into their home without asking.
- Nearly one in five people (18%) said that someone sometimes comes into their room without asking, or when they did not want them to. They said this was most likely to be someone they lived with (60% of those who said this happened), a paid support worker (40%) or a relative or friend they didn’t live with (4%).
- Most people said they could be alone with people who come to visit them (93%) and that they could be alone as much as they liked (93%).
- Just over one in five people (22%) said that sometimes people opened their letters without asking them.
Suitability and Privacy

This section is about people living in private households and people living in supported accommodation.

**Suitability**

When we studied all the answers to the questions we decided that the person’s accommodation may be unsuitable if people said that any of the following things were true:

- The person was unhappy where they were living
- The support person said the house was unsuitable
- The person has to share a bathroom or kitchen and did not like sharing
- We were told the house was too crowded, cold, or needed a lot of repairs
- The person did not feel safe at night or in the area

Overall, we found that over one in four people (27%) may be living in unsuitable accommodation. This included:

- 33% of people in NHS accommodation
- 28% of people living in private households
- 27% of people supported under the Supporting People programme
- 24% of people in Registered Residential Care Homes

Next we looked at whether some people were more likely to be living in unsuitable accommodation. People were more likely to live in unsuitable accommodation if (in order of importance) they:

- were poor\(^\text{12}\)
- lived in a deprived neighbourhood\textsuperscript{13}
- had poor general health\textsuperscript{14}
- were younger.

\textit{Privacy}

When we studied all the answers to the questions we decided that the person may not have enough privacy if people said that any of the following things were true:

- Someone sometimes comes into their room without asking, or when they did not want them to
- They could not be alone with people who come to visit them
- People opened their letters without asking them.

Overall, we found that over one in three people (39\%) did not have enough privacy.

Next we looked at whether some people were more likely to have less privacy than others. People were likely to have less privacy if (in order of importance) they:

- Had higher support needs
- Were younger
- Did not live alone
- Were a man
- Lived in a more deprived neighbourhood
- Were from a minority ethnic community (especially Asian)
- Had a long-standing illness or disability