

Housing: No one's speciality and no one's responsibility

The vision of Valuing People Now is that in three years time more people will either own their own home or live in rented accommodation. But the reality is that local authorities lack the expertise to achieve this vision. *Community Living* asked **Andrew Young** of Housing Options, one of the country's few experts on housing for people with learning difficulties, to explore with the help of his colleagues what could be done to get more people into their own homes.

Housing for people with learning difficulties is one of the most difficult and complex things to get right.

There are varied estimates of the number of people with learning difficulties living in England, but when you take into account those with less severe disabilities and the large population who are not in touch with any services, the numbers can be large indeed: one million and upwards.

Most people with learning difficulties (50 – 60 per cent) live with their families. Those who have moved out are mainly in residential care (30 per cent and rising). Only 15 per cent have a tenancy and very few own their homes. This compares to the wider population where 71 per cent of households are owner-occupiers, and 29 per cent are tenants (19 per cent social housing tenants, 10 per cent private tenants).

It is one of Valuing People Now's central themes but, paradoxically, at a time when recommended policy and good practice is for people to have as much independence as possible in their own homes, the purchase of places in residential care has been increasing. Housing has often been seen as nobody's speciality and nobody's responsibility: social services have not developed expertise in housing matters; mainstream housing has often been impossible to acquire.

Planning for housing, and implementing these plans, involves a complicated jigsaw of many pieces; care, support, bricks and mortar, capital, welfare benefits. I have been involved for some time with Housing Options, an organisation set up to answer the need for expert and accurate advice on housing matters for people with learning difficulties. In the following pages, I have assembled articles covering the main issues confronting us and those trying to achieve more independent housing for people with learning difficulties. **Maurice Harker**, a national expert on supported housing, gives us his formula for

planning the right home; I look at the pros and cons of renting; of topical interest, **Claire Hall** gets us up to date with low cost ownership for people with learning difficulties; and **Steve Harris** tells us the current state of play with Supporting People. I conclude with my thoughts on one of the newer hoops people are having to jump through – assumed incapacity.

In the next issue, **Gill Levy** describes how an environment can be adapted to make life easier for people with visual problems and **Martin Nicholas** looks at how the US has solved the problem of night time support using assistive technology. If you have queries on any aspect of housing, go to our site, www.housingoptions.org.uk, or call us on 0845 456 1497.

***Andrew Young is Lead Advisor for
Housing Options***