

Blog

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Autism Awareness Week – for MH/LD Today

### **Thinking differently – a new approach to Autism support**

*Certitude Support Manager, Mark Wallis, who is an expert in supporting people with autism, says a better understanding of ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) has led to a new way to provide supported housing for people with the condition.*

“Autism is very different from a learning disability and it’s only in recent years that this has been fully understood. With the launch of the [National Autism Strategy](#) in 2014 as well as high-profile research by psychologists like [Dr Neil Hammond](#) and the increasing social media presence of people with autism like [Temple Grandin](#) we’ve seen a growing awareness of what it means to be autistic and, as a consequence, the best way to provide support.

One important insight has been that people with autism find it very hard to live closely with others. Having to conform to the norms of a group, be exposed to other people’s ways and noise and having to adapt to an environment which is out of their control, can be very challenging for people with autism. In fact, being forced to live in these circumstances, can create a lot of frustration which can lead to aggressive outbursts, labels of “challenging behaviour” and, in extreme cases, sectioning. These were just the kinds of descriptions being applied to people who now live much more happily in a new service we provide in Richmond.

The [London Borough of Richmond](#) responded very quickly to the advice given in the National Autism Strategy and in 2016 opened a unique supported living environment for people with Autism. Certitude’s expertise and willingness to embrace change, led us to be awarded the contract to provide the support at this service and the results for the four people who now live there have been really encouraging.

Each person has their own apartment where we provide one-to-one support 24/7. Perhaps the most important shift from the kind of care that they were receiving before is that now they are in control; we are working *for* them and we respect that they are the experts in their own condition. We support people with widely different needs from a young man with high functioning Asperger’s to someone who is non-verbal and requires a great deal of support with communication.

While we fully respect the differences between people, there are some common challenges faced by people across the autistic spectrum and it’s really helpful for all our staff to understand these. For example, we try to eliminate any shocks or surprises, we keep to the routine people feel comfortable with and we avoid making any last minute changes to plans. We encourage people to communicate what they want us to do to keep them happy and calm; this might include small details about where they would rather we sit or stand when near them or how they prefer to travel when we go out. Ensuring that we get these small things right for someone can make life so much better. For people who are non-verbal we

are finding assistive technology increasingly helpful – iPads, computer programmes and phone apps all make a real difference.

I love working with people with autism; they have a refreshing lack of ego, say what they think and look at the world from a different perspective. I'm delighted that large [corporates](#) like [Microsoft](#) are beginning to recognise the value of people with autism and are adapting working environments to suit the autistic point of view. I look forward to the creation of more supported housing solutions like the one we provide in Richmond and more people with autism getting themselves heard and taking their rightful place in society."

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