



**Autism
Together**

Autism Methodology

Our Approach to Supporting
People with Autism



Our Approach to Supporting People with Autism

Introduction

This document sets out the principals and values of Autism Together’s methodology for supporting people who receive our services.

The organisation has developed over the years since its humble beginnings, when families stood up for the rights of their children to be supported and educated by professionals who knew about their child’s condition. Working together with people who have Autism, and their families, is still our core belief. Our understanding, knowledge and experience of Autism for over 50 years has grown as we have come to appreciate and understand what works well for people who have Autism.

Over those years, research in Autism has grown in terms of understanding of the condition and there has been much progress in what we know and understand about different aspects of the condition. However, along the way there has been occasional research that has offered families ‘miracle cures’, which have later been discredited. Therefore, the approaches that we use have been well established by the research and practitioner community and verified by academic peers.

The key feature of supporting people who have Autism is the understanding that each and every person is different; needing their support directly tailored to their needs.

This document sets out the way in which we believe is best to support people who have Autism. Our core methodology is that we come together with the person who has Autism, their family and professionals’ network to truly deliver a unique and personalised service, which enables the individual to live their best life.

As our organisation developed, we came together as a group; people with Autism, staff, families, and trustees, to look at defining the organisation’s core beliefs. Our vision and core values underpin all that we do now guiding as we grow and develop together in the future.

Vision & Values

Our Vision

To be a person-centred organisation that people **trust, understand** and **believe** in.

Our Values

We have five key value statements that underpin our approach to the work we do as an organisation and as individuals:



Positive Communication



Person-Centred



Promote Learning



Be Respectful



Community Connection

What we know and believe about Autism

We know that each and every person we support is unique. Each person has their own life story, their own likes and dislikes, hopes, and dreams. In supporting them with their life journey it is crucial that we get to know them as a person; that we value their strengths and challenges and that we work with them to develop support plans that work for them.

We know that a deep and comprehensive understanding of Autism ensures staff get to know the unique way in which Autism presents in each individual, enabling them to tailor the specialist support in order to ensure positive outcomes for the individual.

We understand that the language used to describe a person who has an autistic spectrum condition is important. We are respectful and understand that some people prefer one term rather than another. Whilst most academic text refers to Autism as a disorder, we refer to Autism as a condition as we believe it is not a disorder to treat and try to eradicate, but rather a condition to understand and to support the individual to live the best life they can.

We understand that Autism is a lifelong condition and at present there is no known single cause or cure. We understand that Autism is not a condition which can be diagnosed by a medical test, but rather an assessment carried out by a clinically trained professional.

Research in Autism is widespread. We understand that there are vast amounts of research projects looking to address the shortfall in understanding why Autism occurs. Whilst we support the research community and are keen to keep abreast of the latest research findings, we will be cautious in our implementation of research; choosing to follow methods which have been proven and are subject to robust scrutiny by peer professionals.

Within the local and national community, Autism Together promotes learning about Autism. We seek to educate the community about the challenges people with Autism face, and to also celebrate achievements.



Who we believe we can support

Our services are specialist services for people who have Autism. We support people across the spectrum that have a diagnosis of Autism. We believe that each person's support needs are unique to them and can change over time. We believe that people should have the "right support" at the "right time" in the "right location". We have developed our own support journey to reflect this (see appendix 1).

The admissions team undertake an in-depth assessment of each person before we offer our specialist services. This assessment considers the person needs and wishes and how best to support them. Assessments are ongoing throughout their support journey with us.

Co-occurring conditions

Several co-occurring conditions appear to be related to Autism in the sense that they co-occur more often in the Autism population than they do in the general population.

We understand that some people who have an Autism diagnosis will have some additional needs. These can range from learning disabilities, epilepsy, mental health issues, mobility issues,



anxiety disorders etc. We understand that presence of such conditions makes it more likely for a person to display behaviours which may challenge. We will support people who have additional needs, if we are able to, within the services that we offer.

Age ranges

Autism is a lifelong condition, which is often diagnosed around the age of two or three years old. However, we recognise that for many people who have Autism, a late diagnosis in their teenage years or adult life is the reality of the situation.

We support people who have Autism right across the age range. Our Children and Family service offers support, guidance and advice for families along with some after school activity clubs. For those individuals who have been with the organisation for many years and are close to, or moving through retirement age, ageing can be a confusing time with the additional medical and physical needs they may have. Through our support journey of Right Support, Right Time, Right Location, we will work with people in a person-centred way throughout their lives.

The services Autism Together provides

We have a variety of services, and some individuals access more than one service at a time. We provide residential support and day service support, along with supported living, training and advice to people about Autism.

All services employ highly trained and skilled staff who have an in-depth understanding of Autism, and we deliver a person-centred specialist service.

Our residential services are located within the Northwest region, within Wirral and Cheshire our residential services are a combination of small residential homes for 2 or 3 people within the community, to slightly larger homes with high staffing levels, offering small group living accommodation in robust environments.

Our day services offer a programme of structured activity during the day. Each person has a specific individual timetable of activities dependent upon their interests and skills. Each service area offers a range of activities. The service follows a pathway that works alongside our support journey with the aims of increasing independence.

In all of our residential and day service provision the environment is important, we try to offer an environment suitable to the individuals that live in the service. These services take into account space, light, sound, decoration etc from an Autism specific and a person-centred perspective.

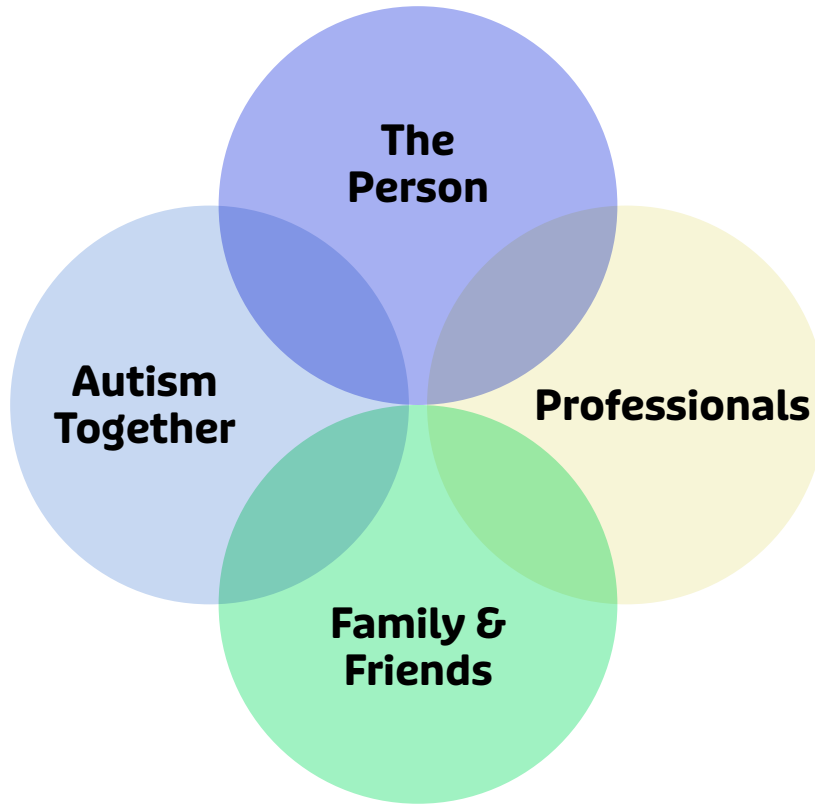
Within supported living, we support a number of people to maintain a tenancy within the community. Many of whom need personalised support with all aspects of living in the community; individuals with Autism may be vulnerable without this specialist support. We work with specialist registered social landlords in order to ensure the environments meet the needs of the individuals living in those tenancies.

We also support families of people with autism who need support to help understand their condition or understand how to navigate the pathway to diagnosis. We do this through facilitating support services such as peer support, signposting, and training workshops in areas such as behaviour and sensory needs. We also offer families the opportunity to join organised community sessions, dedicated to children with autism.

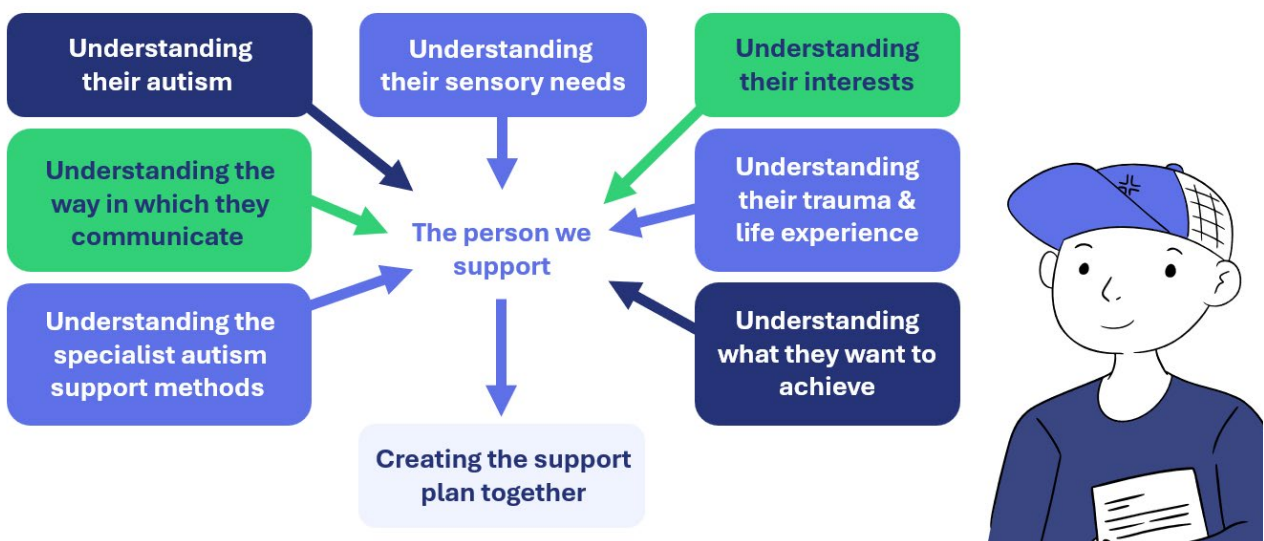


Key principles of our Support

People who have Autism are telling us that they want high quality, personal, flexible services, and they also want to have a voice in how their care and support is created. Recognising that high quality services are not created in isolation from the person, their family or their professional support but rather specialist quality support works best when all of these people come together to deliver a person-centred package of support. Our approach relies on all people around the individual working together and sharing information, this approach is taken throughout the individuals support journey within Autism Together.



Creating a shared understanding of the individual



The above model shows that understanding an individual is crucial to getting the support model right.

We believe that in order to support a person who has Autism a number of supportive steps need to be taken. In terms of approaches, we have an eclectic approach which takes elements from proven Autism specific methodologies in order to support the individual. How we choose which approaches to employ is shown through the below pathway.

Our Autism specific approaches include:

Communication Support

People with Autism experience differences in communication. They may develop, use and understand language differently to others. Struggle to understand the typical rules of conversation due to differences in social understanding. Ability to process information is affected. Difficulty interpreting body language, facial expressions, eye contact. Some people with Autism may have Echolalia. They may take language literally and can find it difficult to interpret the meaning of others. We at Autism Together recognise that communication is a two-way process and so we look to support both a person's expressive and receptive communication skills. We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and so all methods of behaviour serve the function of communicating a person's needs and or wishes. At Autism together we use the following supportive tools & methods: PECS – gives a communication strategy for individuals who may not use their voice, and a way in which to make their needs known. Social Stories can help people to understand complex social rules around communication. Personalised Communication using symbols, objects of reference, MAKATON, BSL or AAC are other ways that we can support people to communicate on an individual basis.

Using Visual Structure

The use of structure is a key component of supporting people with Autism, ensuring that the day and tasks are structured with a clear beginning, middle and end, gives clarity and reduces anxiety for the individual. It provides structure for the day, week, month, year. It is a way of communicating events, tasks, requests, and provides predictability.

Active support

By ensuring that individuals are an active participant within their care planning and their lives ensures that people feel valued and involved in their lives.

Daily life therapy

This promotes a positive rhythm to the day, encouraging good sleep patterns, healthy food and generous exercise. These are the elements we have adopted to ensure that the people we support maximise their opportunities for generous amounts of exercise and healthy nutritious food and to encourage those who have more independence skills to consider healthy food options.



Embracing technology

New innovations can help individuals understand the world around them, it can also assist us in identifying when individuals need extra support.

Continuous assessment

We believe that a person is continuously able to learn and gain new skills as they develop throughout their life.

Meeting Sensory needs

Individuals with Autism can have significant sensory differences and may need to follow a sensory diet to have these needs met. Autism Together will explore individuals' sensory differences by completing a sensory profile and working closely with local Occupational Therapy Services.

Capable environments

Capable environments that can meet an individual's sensory and behaviour needs can greatly support a person with Autism. This is a factor that Autism Together considers when designing spaces that support individuals with complex Autism.

Positive behaviour support (PBS) and the Autism Together Model (ATM)

PBS is a framework that brings the above approaches together using analysis and assessment as an effective approach for promoting evidence-based practice and support. Autism Together has developed its own training model which has been extensively assessed by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) and certified by the United Kingdom Accreditation Scheme (UKASS) against the Restraint Reduction Network (RRN) Standards. This has enabled Autism Together to deliver Physical Intervention training that is contingent to the organisations core values of providing high quality, person centred and evidence-based services to people with an Autism Spectrum Condition and reflects the Autism Together Approach methodology whilst promoting the organisation's Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) organisational culture and strategy.



Assessment and Transition into Service

We are clear about the services we provide being specialist for people with Autism. The pathway of assessment and transition into our services clearly assesses whether a person meets that criteria and whether we would be able to offer a support package.

People who wish to receive our services can be living with their parents, receiving education, in a specialist hospital, or in a crisis situation after breakdown of current placement.

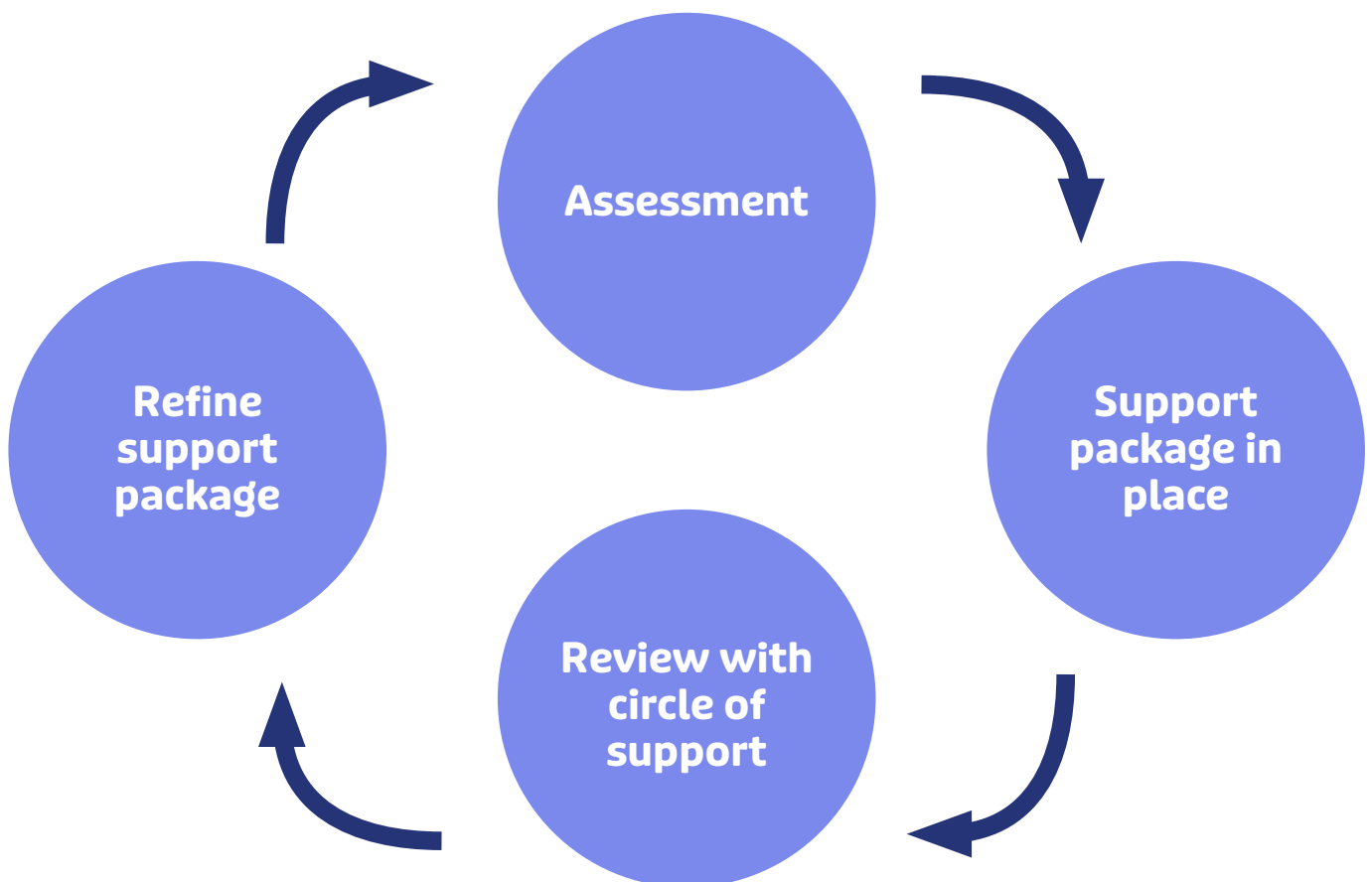
Initial enquires can come from a number of places, through families or local authority frameworks. We ask for people to complete a comprehensive document which gives

an overview of the individual; this is often completed by the family. We have a specialist admissions team who support people through the often-complex process of gaining funding and transitioning to our services.

This team undertake detailed assessments that to enable us to work with the circle of support around an individual, in order to put in place a personal transition plan into our services, and person-centred support planning documentation. We continue to assess and refine those support plans within the first few weeks as we get to know the individual person, their interests and aspirations.

Ongoing Review

Throughout an individuals support journey with Autism Together, the circle of reviewing and refining the support offered through the philosophy of “Right Support, Right Time and Right Location” is constant and forefront. By constantly challenging our thinking and receiving ongoing feedback from individuals, family, carers and professionals, we ensure that the packages of support in place remain right for the individual.



Quality assurance

To ensure that we have the highest possible standards within all of our services, we have an ongoing quality assurance process. This includes daily weekly and monthly internal quality assurance checks by service managers, quarterly peer reviews and annual checks on services through our internal the Intervention and Assurance experts and Health and Safety experts. We invest in annual quality assurance checks from external organisations, who specialise in checking Autism Services. Our residential and supported living services are also subject to local authority provider inspections and CQC inspections.



Staff Training and recruitment

We believe that the key to having specialist staff starts right at the point of recruitment, clearly advertising the many aspects of the role and the benefits staff will gain in supporting people who have Autism to live fulfilling lives. Our recruitment is based on finding the right values in potential staff, an ability to learn, to be an excellent communicator, to show empathy and to have and demonstrable supportive attitudes are traits that we seek.

We are able to give staff training and understanding in Autism due to the comprehensive package of training they receive in the first 6 months of their service. Much of which is delivered by our in-house staff who have vast amounts of experience and knowledge of working with people who have Autism.

Whilst going through their induction, staff accumulate knowledge and training which enables them to complete the Care Certificate as laid out by the Skills for Care Council. Further learning is undertaken to develop their understanding of Autism throughout the first 6 months. This training is logged and evidenced on a software database, which enables the direct line manager to evidence that they, as new staff, are putting their newly gained knowledge and skills into practice and reflecting on their role as a support working to enhance and develop their skills.

Once induction has been completed, staff are given regular core training, which refreshes and updates their knowledge of the many different aspects of Autism. All care staff will be competency assessed within the first 3 months

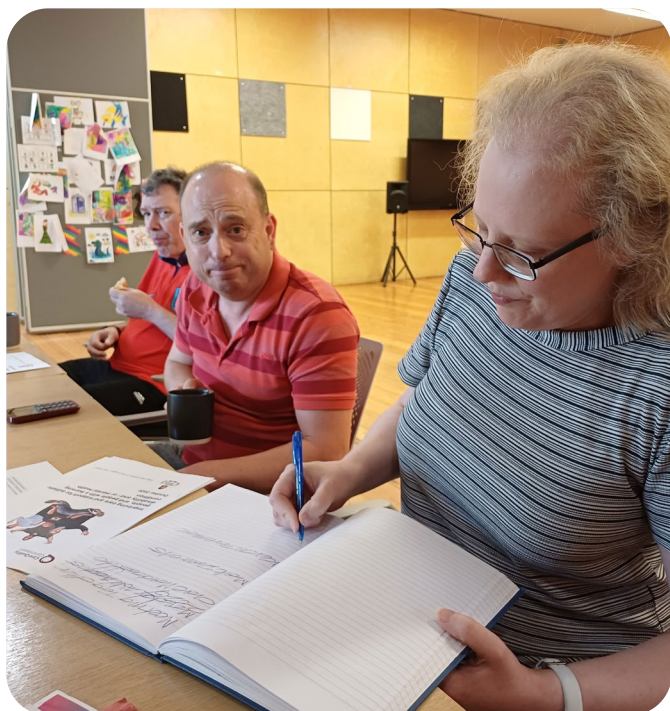
against the care standards.

Ongoing supervision programmes from experienced managers ensure that support staff continuously apply knowledge and best practice and apply the values of the organisation to their roles and the support that we give to our people.

Staff are also able to take the opportunity to learn from ongoing CPD and learning opportunities such as conferences, expert speakers and training courses provided by accredited bodies such as BiLD. External expert support is available for our PBS Leads and our Development Manager to ensure our PBS practice remains current. We have an internal development framework to deliver PBS training to all levels of the workforce.

Many of our staff are supported to gain professional qualifications to aid their development, through apprenticeships and commercial diplomas. Some staff have also been supported to attend Autism specific courses, run by international trainers such as PECS and TEACCH in Autism related subjects.





Involvement of people who have Autism.

We believe that at the core of our approach is the drive to include people we support in all that we do.

Each person we support has an annual review of their support, celebrating their achievements and aspirations and looking forward to planning the forthcoming year. These reviews are individual, and individuals are involved throughout. Many people we support make a project, bring some photos, or organise music at these events.

Many individuals we support feed into the organisation through co-production – this can take many forms such as feedback surveys, behaviour analysis, tenant and resident meetings, forums and supporting training delivery. Some examples of this include co-production of delivery of Oliver McGowan and ATM programmes.

Support Journey

Right support, Right time,
Right location



Circle of support

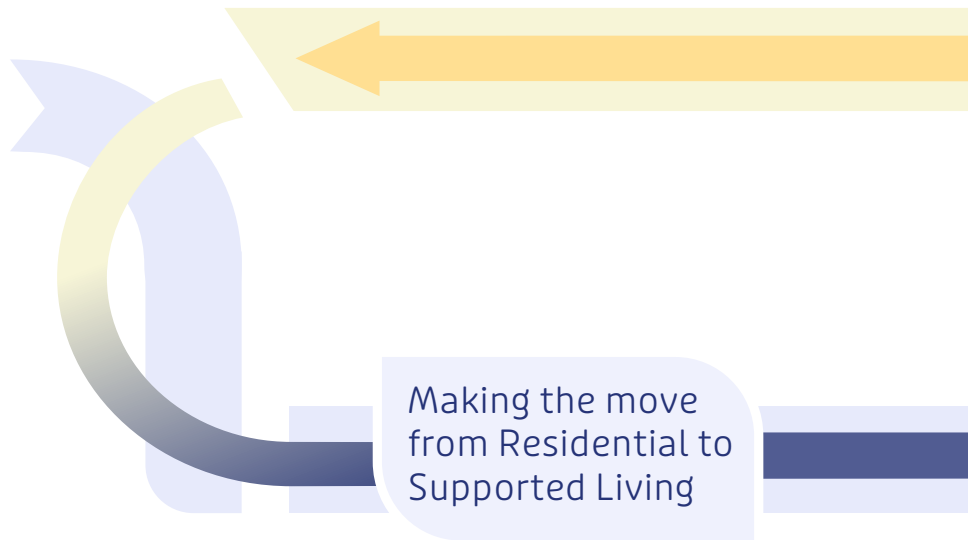
Family
Social Services
Health
Friends
Support staff

We celebrate positive outcomes with the people we support and their circle of support. We encourage people to reach beyond their current achievements and aim for the extraordinary.

Joining Autism Together

Our staff are knowledgeable, experienced and ready to support autistic people right through their journey with Autism Together. Our team gets to know the person we are supporting, using an holistic strengths based assessment.

Following the assessment, and if we have assessed we can meet the needs of the person, we will recommend an appropriate placement. We will also offer person-centred autism approaches to support the person in the service we have received the referral for.



Day Services

Our range of Day Services are about offering autistic people meaningful, realistic and achievable training, on the job work experience and valuable life skills. These structured, person-centred programmes offer the necessary communication strategies and support plans, enabling the person to develop independently, safely and confidently.

Residential Care

Our Residential service offers registered residential care in a variety of different types of housing across Wirral and Cheshire.

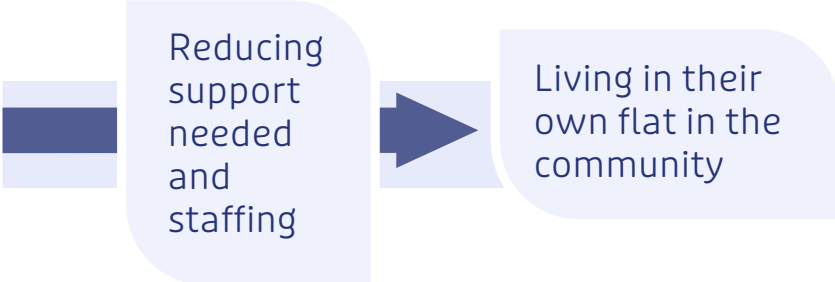
We work with the people we support to help each individual lead as fulfilling and meaningful a life as possible, through a specifically-tailored package of support which involves a full daytime, evening and weekend programme.



People we support can move between Residential care and Supported Living, depending on their needs

Supported Living

Autism Together's Supported Living service provides individualised support for autistic adults in a community setting. Working with registered social landlords, we offer bespoke homes for autistic adults in a variety of housing models, from single flats to shared accommodation.

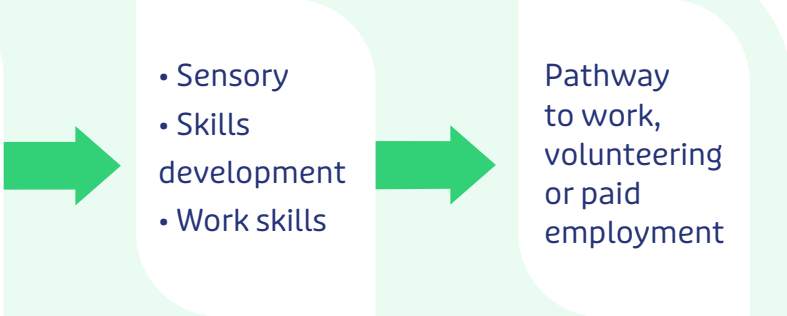


Reducing support needed and staffing

Living in their own flat in the community

Activities include:

- Animal Care
- Art
- Café
- Community-based excursions
- Cooking & life skills
- Dance & performing arts
- Gym
- Media & Music
- Photography
- Use of landscaping machinery

- 
- Sensory
 - Skills development
 - Work skills

Pathway to work, volunteering or paid employment



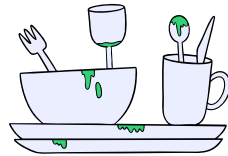
Join Autism Together



Residential Care

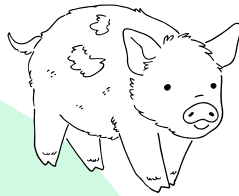
Right support

People with any level of support needs can live in Residential care, generally they are people that need support around them at all times.



Supported Living

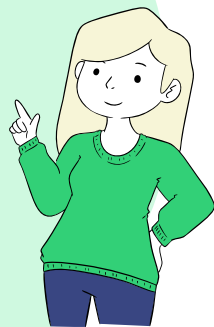
Supported Living isn't just for people that are able to live completely independently, it's for everyone. The most important thing is having just the right level of support for the person in place. This can be just a few hours a week or can be intensive 1:1 or 2:1 support at all times.



Day Services

Day Services

Different levels of support within Day Services allows people to access the most appropriate support for their needs. By focusing on people's strengths and interests, we are able to engage people and teach them new skills.



Right time

Support needs can vary throughout a person's life and people's support needs can change. Some may learn new skills and require less support, moving to Supported Living, where another person may develop physical disabilities and require a change in their accommodation

Support needs for individuals change throughout their lives, sometimes they need more support and sometimes they need less. This often depends on what is happening in their lives - times of change might mean that we need to increase someone's support but, equally, people can become more independent.

Day Services is often a step taken by people after leaving education, but it is also a service that can be accessed at any point on someone's journey. Day Services promote independence, skill building, communication, confidence and engagement.

Right location

We have many settings in Residential care - some of our care homes are designed for highly complex individuals that need intensive support in bespoke settings. In contrast to this, we have community residential care homes that don't even look like care homes. You won't find any signs outside any of our houses telling you that they are care homes.

It's important that people live near their family and friends, and in areas and communities that are right for them.

Day Services has a range of sites across the region, and people can choose a service area that suits their needs. We promote individuals to move through our services into employment or volunteer opportunities in their local community, if they wish to do so.



Admissions Team:

☎ 0151 482 3126

✉ admissions@autismtogether.co.uk

Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm

For further enquiries please contact:

General Enquiries:

☎ 0151 334 7510

✉ enquiries@autismtogether.co.uk

Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm

www.autismtogether.co.uk

Follow us on socials @autismtogetheruk

Wirral Centre for Autism, Oak House, 6 Tebay Road, Bromborough, Wirral, CH62 3PA

Reg. Charity Number: 1007878 Reg. Company Number: 2658268

