

## What the Service is (*ref 01*)

### **Background**

### **Equal Opportunity**

### **The Scope of the Service**

### **How the Service Works**

### **What We Charge for Services**

### **How is Housing Options Funded?**

### **Background**

Housing Options is an independent, advisory service for people with learning disabilities, their relatives and housing and care providers. It was established in 1996 against a background of growing evidence of a shortfall between the need for more places for people with learning disabilities and the supply through the traditional routes.

In 1996 a report *Ownership Options* was published by the National Housing Federation. It provided six detailed case studies on home ownership for someone with a learning disability. Housing Options was set up in response to demand for more detailed information and advice.

Before 1996 there was a fairly limited range of largely residential care services and a culture of professionals deciding what is good for you. Housing Options created not only interest but contributed toward a revolution in the way of thinking about services for people with learning disabilities. The most influential statement of this was in the Government White Paper of 2001 *Valuing People*.

'People with learning disabilities can live successfully in different types of housing.... They can cope with the full range of tenures, including home ownership. Most people with learning disabilities live with their families. Often they leave the family home only as the result of a crisis such as the illness or death of the carer. The Government wishes to see better forward planning so people gain independence in a planned way'.

### **Equal Opportunity**

There is still a big gap between policy aspirations and reality for most people with learning disabilities. About 1 million people in England (including children) have learning disabilities. About a quarter have more severe learning disabilities. Targets set in 1971 for the number of places needed have still not been achieved.

They have more limited housing opportunities than most of us. Few find their homes through council housing or homelessness applications. Most of us live in houses which we own (71%), rent as social housing tenants (19%) or private tenants (10%). Of those with more severe disabilities - most live with their families (50 - 60%), or are in residential care (30%) only few are tenants (15%).

In practice there are barriers.

- The mainstream programmes for housing are about large volume developments rather than individuals and their needs.
- People don't see housing applications as the route to a housing and support package.
- Usually they approach social services or service providers for help. Funding and eligibility provide stiff tests to be negotiated.
- Housing and support need to be planned together but this can be difficult in practice.
- The use of family resources - financial or housing, is often overlooked.

Our aim is to assist people with learning disabilities achieve greater control over aspects of their life and to provide more housing and support choices - more options for individuals, parents, social services, care agencies.

### **The Scope of the Service**

Housing Options is a national advice service and can provide advice on rented housing and home ownership options. It also offers a consultancy service to individuals, parents and any organisation involved in providing a service to people with learning disabilities.

Housing Options can help with things like:

- Renting in public and private sector
- Leases and tenancy agreements
- Legal capacity
- Shared Ownership and Homebuy
- Outright ownership
- Funding and mortgages
- Using Discretionary Trusts or Setting up a company
- Income Support, Housing Benefits, ILF, Direct Payments
- Support arrangements for independent living
- Property maintenance
- Using the family home, and family investment

### **How the Service Works**

Housing options has one main advisor who works part time and manages the service. This core advisor is supported by a network of leading experts.

Housing Options also has a national co-ordinator who works part time. The co-ordinator takes all initial calls and enquiries to Housing Options.

Housing Options has a team of housing advisors across the country. The national co-ordinator can arrange on request, for people to meet face to face with a housing advisor and put together a Housing Options Plan.

The service can provide the following:

- free advice by telephone, letter or e-mail.
- free advice via the website, Factsheets and Quick Briefs.
- individual consultation on a fee paying basis face to face.
- personal consultation and advice for individuals, families or for groups through our housing advisors.
- a consultation service for organisations involved in provision or support.
- list of printed publications and prices.
- help with work shops, conferences and seminars on housing and support.
- day workshops for family carers or professionals eg Tools for Planning.
- resources and problem solving for agencies and advisors working in the field of learning disabilities.
- links to housing and support providers who can help individuals locally.

Our Housing Options Plan system has been devised to introduce people, their families and care managers to range of housing and support possibilities. A Housing Advisor gathers information by visiting and working with the individual and their family/friends/care manager/carers and key people. A Housing Options Plan (HOP) is the prepared and provides recommendations on options.

The service does not have the resources to offer extended casework level help but may be able to assist by suggesting suitable individuals or organisations locally who could provide help.

## What We Charge for Services

- No charge is made for information by telephone, e-mail or advice by letter.
- All of our factsheets are available on our website. Paper copies of our factsheets may be requested from Housing Options at a charge of £3 per factsheet, with the exception of No.1 which is free.
- For conferences, workshops, seminars and in-house training there is a charge of £300 for half a day and £600 for a whole days work.
- For personal consultation with our Housing Advisors there is a fee of £85 per hour.
- The fee for an individual Housing Options Plan, completed by one of our Housing Advisors is £1150.
- Housing Options request that travelling expenses are covered by the party requesting the work.
- Housing Options will make no charge for limited direct advice to a learning disabled individual dependent on benefits, or a relative in a similar position.

## How is Housing Options Funded?

Housing Options is currently supported by a group of organisations who provide funding and a network to help solve problems.

A list of funding members can be found on the housing options website – [www.housingoptions.org.uk](http://www.housingoptions.org.uk).

If you require further information or have other queries contact Housing Options.

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