

Support Tenant (*ref 16*)

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Introduction

This factsheet explains how someone with a learning disability can be supported by a tenant who lives with them. It draws heavily on the experience and practice of the Ling Trust who specialise in providing support for people in this way.

What is a Support Tenant?

A support tenant shares the home of someone who has a learning disability (it might be a couple). They live with them as a friend or 'flat mate'. They share household tasks and bills just like any other unrelated friends sharing a house might. In addition the support tenant agrees, with the care provider, to do some additional things which help the person with learning disabilities live more independently than might otherwise be possible.

Support tenants are part of a range of choices for people with learning disabilities.

What Sort of Things Do Support Tenants Do?

A list of the activities a support tenant might do taken from a typical contract is attached to this factsheet. The kinds of things a support tenant usually agrees are to:

- be at home between certain hours e.g. 7pm to 8am
- be at home on an agreed number of nights each week
- give notice to the care provider if they are not going to be around during the contracted times or prior to going on holiday
- help the person they share with make breakfast and/or an evening meal a number of days each week
- involve the disabled person in daily living tasks and social activities

What Happens When the Support Tenant is Not in?

During the day the person with learning disabilities will do the same kinds of things any other similar disabled person would do and be supported in similar ways. The support tenant arrangement primarily helps with overnight support when someone wants to live more independently but needs or wants overnight help or security. They can help deal with daily life and problems in the same way any other pair sharing a house or flat might.

However, this understates the potential value and role of a support tenant arrangement.

What is Particularly Valuable About Support Tenants?

- For many disabled people this may be the first (only?) opportunity to live with and share activities with someone who is not also disabled – other than perhaps parents
- It can be a very positive, genuine, friendship
- It can be the key to making independent supported living economically feasible
- It can play a part in linking someone with the wider community helping build a social network

Shortcomings of Support Tenant Arrangements

The risks most frequently mentioned are that support tenants will leave, prove unsuitable or that there will be a high turnover of support tenants.

Some of these risks can be reduced by:

- careful selection of support tenants
- training and supervision of the support tenant
- involving the person with learning disabilities in the selection process - essential
- regular reviews and monitoring of arrangements
- employment by an experienced care provider agency

There is likely to be turnover; students may sometimes be attracted to doing this for a while. In evaluating this option it should be borne in mind:

- there is turnover of staff in any residential home or care service – this is not unusual
- if the philosophy of promoting an 'ordinary life' is accepted then it is 'normal' to face changes in relationships from time to time Having said this compared to living at home with parents this is likely to be a more variable arrangement.

Supervision and monitoring of the support tenant is required to safeguard the resident and get the most out of this arrangement.

Do Support Tenants Get Paid?

Usually support tenants will have another full or part-time job or for example be at college/university during the day. Support tenants might expect to:

- live rent free
- receive a modest honorarium for expenses or a fee, around £100 - £140 per month depending on what they do and the time they put in

Any agency considering using support tenant arrangements should take their own tax advice but it has been established that payments of expenses at this level are not taxable.

It is advisable for the support tenant to insure their personal belongings. The contract will allow for holidays and sickness pay and cover.

What is the Status of the Support Tenant?

The learning disabled person will normally be the tenant or owner of the property. The support tenant is likely to be a lodger. This means they have no security of tenure. This helps to protect the more vulnerable, disabled resident.

The contract with the support tenant will provide for a period of notice if they want to leave - say one month and indicate how long they are expected to stay in the first place - say twelve months. However, neither is easy to enforce in practice.

The nature of the agreement with the support tenant will require careful thought and legal advice. What you need to ensure is that you have a service contract so that if the support tenant no longer provides the necessary support they have no right to continue living in the property.

The support tenant would also be entitled to one months notice.

How Do You Recruit and Select Support Tenants?

Support tenants come from a variety of sources where the opportunity can be promoted or advertised:

- churches
- GPs surgeries
- recommendations from former support tenants/care workers
- previous carers

The keys to successful pairing are:

- attitude – must like people and company, easy going
- local connections and network
- commitment to supporting independence
- compatibility – mutual regard
- motivated to become a support tenant
- ability to stand back
- patience

Involvement of the disabled person in selection is vital and often family, friends, previous carers or advocates are involved as well.

What Happens When a Support Tenant Leaves?

The alternatives include:

- replace the support tenant
- change the support arrangements
- for the individual being supported to continue to live as they were but without a support tenant
- for someone else to move in and share the house but not be a support tenant

Some people with learning disabilities grow out of the scheme and move on or when a support tenant leaves are happy to live on their own.

The Role of Support Tenant

The support tenant will:

- involve the individual in a social occasion at least once a week
- be available to the individual in accordance with the attached timetable i.e. be at home between certain hours/certain days
- offer friendship, support and companionship to the individual
- offer support and general advice to the individual with any care plan, risk policy or any policy regarding drugs
- help and advise the individual to develop his/her sexuality through appropriate ways and encourage social interaction and develop relationships - in general be a good role model
- help the individual in dealing with certain household issues:
 - visitors
 - household emergencies
 - household management and maintenance
 - correspondence
 - personal and household security
 - daily living activities
- help the individual to deal with messages and correspondence if appropriate, encourage them to write down appointment times and telephone messages. Support workers will help on a daily basis but Support Tenants may at times be needed to help immediately.
- help to ensure the individual understands issues relating to security. This will also relate to personal property
- attend reviews or meetings as required.
- help the individual to get up in time for appointments or work
- encourage the individual to live as independently as possible and also develop their self-confidence
- be a good role model. For example, introduce friends and visitors, helping to extend these networks.
- agree house rules with the individual regarding smoking, visitors, music, telephone, cooking, bills and tidiness of rooms

- pass on any worries or concerns that the individual might have to the appropriate person or support tenant co-ordinator
- respect the individual's confidentiality and not discuss details with inappropriate people
- contact the individual's Social Worker if for any reason the support worker has not arrived to support them at the specified time
- inform the co-ordinator as early as possible if they cannot support the tenant due to sickness or an emergency or any other reason

More Information and Practical Guides

An alternative to a Support Tenant is a Homeshare arrangement, see our *Quick Brief Homeshare (ref 48)* - www.housingoptions.org.uk/general_information/gi_quick_briefs/qb_48.pdf. The Homeshare website is www.homeshare.org.uk. It contains a lot of advice for individuals thinking about a homeshare arrangement and is also useful for organisations who might consider co-ordinating or managing a homeshare service. It has comprehensive practice guides, and sample forms which you can use.

We are grateful to the Ling Trust for contributing material on which this *Factsheet* is based.

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

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