

NDSPG Housing Case Study

Florence had been living in a shared, supported living, setting in London since February 2020. The building has two flats. The flat she lived in had two bedrooms and the other flat three. Each had its own kitchen, living room and bathroom. The 24-hour support team were based in the 3-bedroom flat.

This setting was always advertised as a transition housing arrangement with an intended maximum of three years. As it was, she stayed there for five years.

Florence was first put in touch with the Transitions Development Officer from Richmond Borough Council in 2014. He remained her point of contact for housing throughout the process. Her case was complicated as we (parents) were posted abroad. Florence spent time between living abroad with us and in London with me. We returned fully to the UK in the summer of 2019, however began the process of looking for a flat through social services the year before in 2018. Because of the lack of availability and appropriate flats her move was not finalised until February 2020. (This was complicated because the flat she wanted to go to was out of borough). Through out the process her Transitions Development Officer was extremely helpful and always available. Her social workers on the other hand were not. It was always a chore to see them and make them understand the need for Florence to move out of the family home. Her reviews, when they happened, were in our opinion a tick box exercise.

Florence moved into her flat in London on 3rd February 2020. It was, on-the-whole successful, but not without challenges. It was facilitated by the local authority and her social workers were involved. There were many false starts and hiccups. We visited several settings that were in one way or another not appropriate but on-the-whole, it was relatively painless. (I say this, however coming from the stance of an educated individual, with good family support, who is able to negotiate the bureaucracy involved and the inevitable hoops that we had to jump through. If I had been a single mother, with limited income, time, energy and support, with other children to care for, it would have been a lot more difficult.)

We felt that not enough thought had been spent on choosing flat mates who were compatible and this caused many problems, particularly for much of the time her flat mates were all older males. The provider used 'Metropolitan Housing' was badly run, many of the staff were agency, badly trained and unprofessional. Little time was spent supporting the residents. Though overall the first three years were acceptable, there were in no way 'best practice'.

At her three-year review, in 2023 it was felt that Florence should start looking for a new setting. She was unhappy at the London flat, tenants were moving in and out with little consideration to compatibility as mentioned before, there was a safeguarding issue and the providers were not performing. Subsequently they lost the contract and a new provider was appointed.

It took two years to find a suitable flat. This move was facilitated by the same Transitions Development Officer as before, working for Wandsworth and Richmond Borough Council who have now merged. It was difficult time, with a lot of challenges and a few disappointments. Many of the settings offered were inappropriate, either because of their location, or the support package or a lack of understanding of what a young lady with Down Syndrome needs and desires. (For example one setting offered was going to be next to another setting with a cohort of young people with mental health issues. Another in a compound with an old person's institution, another too far for independent travel.)

Eventually, however, in March this year Florence moved into her own flat in a block of 9. The other tenants have been chosen carefully and to date there seem to be no issues. (It is early days!) The provider United Response (appointed by the local authority) are well run, however, though still in the borough, the flat is considerably further than we would have liked, but with limited availability and choice we were obliged to take what was offered. The tenancy comes with 24-hour cover and a core package for each tenant worked out according to their needs.

Veronique, parent of Florence