



Definition of Village Communities

There are well over two hundred thousand adults living in the United Kingdom with learning disabilities and autism. Their disabilities cover a wide spectrum. For example, there are some people with Downs Syndrome who can be TV presenters or actors whilst others (estimated to be about 2% of the total population of those with learning disabilities) have much more challenging and profound disabilities.

It is in the context of this minority that Communities variously described as ‘Villages’, ‘Intentional’ or ‘Shared -Life’ Communities came into being, enabling their residents to live as full and as independent a life as possible by providing light but constant supervision and care, to ensure their safety and wellbeing. These communities have specifically developed a model of care that enables their residents to have a quality of life that no other choice of care and support can offer.

These communities will have different characteristics and personalities and not all will have the totality of the characteristics described below.

Communities will vary in size. Typically, residents live in small scale housing including bungalows, flats and shared houses often in rural or semi-rural settings surrounded by mental health enhancing trees and gardens. Residents in some are able to get the physical and mental health benefits of green open spaces, gardening, vegetable and fruit growing and tending chickens. Some have craft, music, computer and other workshops, although during the process of trying to close these communities, many of these were shut down. Fortunately, they are now being brought back into existence. Some have a community hall, which is used for parties, films, discos and events throughout the year both for the residents and for people who live in the vicinity.

Probably though the most important aspect of these communities is their ability to provide their residents with an environment where people can enjoy the freedom of a safe home among like-minded people with a rich set of personal interactions and relationships – all within a sheltered environment.

Residents can everyday wander safely from their home into one of their friends’ homes and have a coffee. Every day, they can dip in and out of a variety of activities taking place on site. Every day, they can talk and engage with the many staff who work in such communities – thereby having meaningful and enriching relationships with many different people.

It is also an environment that is fully integrated with its neighbourhood, drawing on and adding to the local facilities. Residents, enjoy a wide and enriching variety of activities off site as well. They go to the pubs, nearby community centres, sports events, discos, go shopping, walking and cycling in local parks and the countryside. They are accepted and are well-known and loved parts of the neighbouring communities.

It is also a model of care that is cheaper than all the alternatives because the cost of care can be shared. At the same time, it provides carers with a significantly more stimulating and satisfying working environment than the alternative of working with only one colleague in an isolated house in a town. And all the while, outside organisations hold their own events using the community’s facilities for their benefit as well.