

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM TO LIVE THEIR LIVES

Developing relationships

Emmanuel

Background before support

Emmanuel is 26 years old and has a form of autism sometimes known as Asperger's. He has had good support from his parents and siblings and has never needed any additional services other than some reasonable adjustments. Emmanuel is very clear about his needs and what he wants although sometimes finds it difficult to know what he has to do to achieve it.

His parents felt that they were not helping him to become independent and recognised that they were not fulfilling his needs, so decided to step back. They helped him rent a flat that had some support provided during daytime hours. There are 6 flats together provided by a supported housing provider in the local town.

The support worker asks if there is anything Emmanuel needs, but he isn't really sure what the support is for as the other people living in the flats often have help with things like going shopping and cooking which he can do for himself.

Emmanuel is clear that he wants to be independent, to find a job and earn some money.

He also wants to find love and live with a partner that he will marry one day. He does not really mind if this is with a man or a woman.

He is living off PIP money and pocket money from his parents (who also pay his rent). He has been told to claim Universal Credit but is unsure how to do this and went to the Job Centre but was scared of the security guards so did not go in. He is starting to get into debt and doesn't want his parents to know so he is managing this by not eating much and not attending appointments due to the cost of public transport.

The other 5 flats are occupied mainly by people over the age of 40 who have very little in common with him. Most residents keep themselves to themselves - there is one man however who is friendly and invites him around to watch films but they don't really talk much. Emmanuel is unsure if the man wants a relationship or not and is too scared to ask or cannot find the right words. He also wasn't sure if he liked him in 'that way' so he decided to go online and try to connect with other people to meet and have a full relationship with.

Emmanuel had talked to his brother about wanting to have sex and a relationship and his brother said he would help him by setting him up on dating sites and apps on his phone.

Emmanuel told his mum and dad and they were worried, saying that it is risky as he is vulnerable and they had read news stories about people being at risk of assault, sexual exploitation, 'mate crime' or 'cuckooing' (people using his flat for criminal purposes with him having little power to stop this). When they told him about these worries he felt they were trying to 'baby' him and he knew what he was doing and that they didn't know anything about these things.

Emmanuel is a member of a Facebook group for young people with autism. He used to go to a local evening group when he was younger and stopped going when he moved into his flat. A little scared by what his parents said he decided to see what was happening on the Facebook group to see if there was a night out planned and if anyone his age would be going. Simon is also autistic and has epilepsy, he attends the group and had always fancied Emmanuel but knew it wasn't the right time before as he was a few years older. He was really happy to see that Emmanuel had messaged the group and sent him a private message and they decided to meet up. They message and meet up a few times before becoming an item.

The skills, competences and knowledge to make a positive change

The Housing Manager

Encouraged all of the support workers to do online autism awareness training and equality including sexuality. She makes sure that they are person centred and identify ways they might need to make reasonable adjustments to their service for residents including Emmanuel, ensuring that they were not inadvertently discriminating against him on the basis of his sexuality or his autism.

They also provide opportunities for the residents of the supported living environment to come together socially and develop a resident network and peer support, including discussions on topics. She also reinforces with the support workers that they reintroduce themselves to the residents so they are clear of the support that they can offer.

The Housing Support Worker

The support worker has had some awareness training in autism and thought about a different approach in communicating with Emmanuel in order to develop a better relationship. He had noticed that he has been visiting one of the neighbours previously and more recently someone has been staying over. Although that was ok he wanted to make sure that Emmanuel was happy with the arrangements.

The support worker arranged a time to meet with Emmanuel by himself and began by introducing himself and explaining his role. This includes providing advice and support that will enable Emmanuel to live independently and happily within his current flat, including developing his confidence and skills so he may have an independent flat without support one day, if that is what he wanted.

He provided the time for Emmanuel to listen and process to what he was saying and to ask questions about his role. He also offered to come back the next day so Emmanuel would have time to think about any support he may be able to provide in the future.

Emmanuel now understood that he could ask the support worker about anything that was worrying him about living independently. When the support worker returned the next day, Emmanuel asked if he knew how he could sort out his benefits and money, explaining that he was starting to get into debt and he wanted to be able to sort things out without worrying his parents.

The support worker agreed to support Emmanuel through the process of making the right links with the appropriate agencies to sort out his benefits, including Employment Support Allowance and Housing Benefit, and helped him with budgeting so he could manage food and other bills. They devised a plan so that he would start to take control of the bills for the flat so that his parents didn't need to.

The support worker felt confident about asking Emmanuel about the person that regularly visited and stayed over. Emmanuel confirmed that Simon was his boyfriend and that he was really happy as he had wanted a relationship for a long time.

Simon, Emmanuel's boyfriend

Simon is older than Emmanuel and has had a relationship before. He has liked Emmanuel from a distance for a while and allows Emmanuel to take his time getting to know him and whether a relationship is what he wants before he spends longer periods of time at his flat. He also thought it was important that his parents knew before he did.

He met Emmanuel's brother with Emmanuel first, who was supportive.

Simon also recognised that Emmanuel was nervous about developing an intimate relationship and they talked before having sex about using condoms and understanding what each of them is happy with.

A few months after becoming boyfriends, Emmanuel and Simon have developed an open and honest relationship. They enjoy spending time together whilst recognising they each have their own personal interests and hobbies. They have instigated a weekly movie night once a week and invite Emmanuel's neighbour who doesn't have any other friends. Simon is very organised and helps Emmanuel with his bills. Emmanuel is very calm and has learned what to do when Simon has a seizure. Each respects the other's coping strategies and recognise this can help reduce anxiety, including allowing each other time alone when they need it.

Emmanuel has introduced Simon to the housing support worker so they know who each are and, although he does not give consent to the worker talking to Simon about him, he does agree that Simon is a contact point should there be an emergency.

Emmanuel's Mum and Dad

Emmanuel's mum and dad continue to provide support as parents to Emmanuel. They recognise that Emmanuel is in a positive relationship and have met with Simon and the support worker with Emmanuel who explained that he wants to be as independent as possible. They are proud of Emmanuel and agree to continue to support but take a step back from paying his rent once his Benefits are sorted and Emmanuel is keeping to his budgeting plan.

They are pleased that Emmanuel's brother visits regularly and they trust that Emmanuel and his brother would both be honest with them if there was a crisis. They continue to develop their personal knowledge on autism and having a fulfilling life so they can have open and honest conversations about what is true for Emmanuel and what isn't.

Emmanuel's parents realise that they no longer need to be his full-time carers and begin to enjoy a family relationship with both their sons and their partners, taking into account peoples individualism.

Outcome achieved for Emmanuel

Emmanuel has a mutual fulfilling relationship and living an independent life with the right support.

Supporting outcomes

- His parents remain supportive but have stepped back from the carer role, trusting Emmanuel, Simon and their relationship. They no longer pay the rent, providing them with more time and money to enjoy their time together as a couple and a family.
- Emmanuel is much more confident, has the right benefits and is managing his money. He is budgeting and out of debt, including contributing to the rent.
- He has a good support network and knows where to go when he needs it, including the housing support worker.
- He feels he can positively plan for the future and what kind of things he needs and wants to work towards.