

Living independently in his own home

Michael: Background before support

Michael is 36 years old and received a diagnosis of autism in his late teens while at university. He has a full-time job working for the health service and purchased his own home about five years ago. His home has been kept in immaculate order, he is fastidious about his personal hygiene and appearance and is extremely punctual. Michael does not mix socially with any of his work colleagues, most of whom consider him competent but over-sensitive to criticism and he has no social circle away from the workplace except for a select few from far-flung places around the world whom he has befriended via the internet.

Recently, dramatic changes in Michael's behaviour were noticed by his work colleagues: he started arriving for and leaving work at different times of the day, his clothes were not in their usual pristine condition and were often unlaundered, his (lack of) personal hygiene became a frequent topic of conversation in the office and his attention to detail in his work lapsed. His work colleagues were not sure how to approach Michael and as a result started to talk about him, creating a negative workplace atmosphere.

One colleague questioned the accuracy in a piece of work presented by Michael and was met with an "over-the-top" aggressive response that has scared others off challenging him or asking him if anything was wrong due to the significant change in his presentation.

The skills, competencies and knowledge required to make a positive change

Line Manager

Michael's line manager was aware of his diagnosis of autism and had attended a workplace-based autism-awareness session. She was concerned about recent developments and called him in for an informal discussion to see if she could identify and help to resolve the issue. At the very end of a long and, until that point fruitless conversation, Michael mentioned that his elderly father had fallen ill and his mother had stopped visiting him while she tended to her husband's needs. Reluctantly Michael admitted he was finding it difficult to cope and was struggling to sleep and he was feeling low and anxious. As a result of the conversation, he agreed to contact his GP about how he was feeling and social services to see if there was any support he could access. He didn't want a referral to Occupational Health and wanted their conversation to remain confidential. Michael's line manager agreed not to progress a referral at that stage and arranged a date for an update meeting.

Social Worker

The social worker undertaking the assessment of Michael's wellbeing under the Care Act was experienced in supporting adults with autism. She had completed Tier-3 autism-awareness training during her prior experience working in an Integrated Community Mental Health Team a couple of years previous. When she visited Michael in his home for the initial assessment she immediately noted the pile of unwashed clothing on the furniture, a mound of unopened mail on the sideboard and a kitchen awash with discarded takeaway cartons and unwashed cups.

During her assessment, it soon became clear that Michael's elderly mother would normally visit him three or four times each week to undertake the household chores. During her visits she would clean the house, do Michael's washing and ironing, bring along and prepare his food, and would sit down with him, open his

post and direct him how to deal with each item. While Michael had, to the outside world, apparently lived independently for five years he had in fact been totally reliant upon the input from his mother to do so.

The social worker believed Michael did need support to enable him to regain his wellbeing and independence. She didn't think Michael needed a lot of support, rather the correct support that would assist him to live independently, including helping him to develop the skills for himself. In her assessment, she stated that without this support Michael's wellbeing would significantly and rapidly deteriorate, placing his employment and his income at risk. This would consequently also place his home and independence at risk.

A personal budget was allocated to Michael for targeted autism-specific support that could help him maintain his independence and develop his independent living skills.

The social worker contacted the local office of The National Autistic Society and requested their assistance. This led to the appointment of a support worker from their Outreach Team.

Support Worker

Michael's support worker developed a support plan through discussion with him and his mother. The plan included developing with him a weekly timetable to carry out domestic chores, a daily timetable to address his personal hygiene needs, assistance to plan shopping requirements and support to address unopened mail. Initially the programme was quite intensive and was met with some resistance from Michael but, as he became used to the structure offered, the level of need for one-to-one support decreased and is now limited to a two-hour session per week.

The overarching outcome achieved for Michael

Michael has maintained his employment and his home.

Supporting outcomes

- Michael has developed his independent living skills and is less dependent on his mother
- Although his father has now recovered, Michael's mother now only needs to visit twice a week, helping him with, rather than completing his domestic chores
- His relationship with his parents has become much more relaxed as they have gained more confidence in him being able to fend for himself
- His mother has been offered a Carer's Assessment from social services to consider the support she provides to both Michael and her husband
- Michael has returned to being his organised self at work, arriving on time and seems happy
- He is always cleanly-shaved and well-presented and his clothes are always clean (though not always ironed)
- He feels much more in control of his work and less stressed at work as a result
- The tension in the office has diffused. He has weekly meetings with his line manager who has reported no reasons for concern.