

## 6. Housing

Another obvious sign of independence is having your own place to call home, and there is a big difference between a house and a home. Someone once said, 'It takes hands to build a house, but only hearts can build a home.'

When we look for a home, there are certain things that we take into account. We might have an idea of the type of house we want: the number of bedrooms it should have, the parking facilities, the size of the garden and the driveway, or the size of the kitchen. But before all this, we think about the things that are most important to us: our families, our friends, the community and the familiarity of things. We do not suddenly find a house and start building a life around it, but quite the opposite. We build our housing needs around our lives, our priorities and our interests.

This is exactly the same for young people with learning disabilities, yet in our research we have found that in the rush to get a house, this most important factor is often forgotten.

We have found that the happiest transition for young people happened when all these structures were in place before they moved into their new home. We feel it is important to emphasize that getting a house is not the end product, but only a stage in letting the young people blossom and enjoy independence.

The distinction between a house and a home was clearly made by the young people we interviewed, and settling down in their home community was a dominant feature of their housing requirements. Other common requirements included:

- >> location;
- >> safety;
- >> transport;
- >> having pets and
- >> variety of things to do and opportunities to try out new things.



*'Keep transition planning as simple as possible, going out showing different options to live. Going and seeing the place, the visits really helped Kayley and made it easier for her to move because she was familiar.'* **Kayley's support**

In our study we have found that the aspirations of young people with learning disabilities when it comes to housing are the same as those of their peers. They too are striving for independent happy lives and their ambition to live independently comes from the same place as that of their peers. We have found that:

- >> some young people are perfectly happy to live at home with their family;
- >> some young people want to move into their own place to get some independence from their family and to learn new skills;
- >> some young people want to follow in the footsteps of their brothers and sisters who have moved away to university or work;
- >> some want to share the experience of living independently with their best friend;
- >> some want to settle down and get married;
- >> and some, because life is a journey with occasional plain sailing and a lot of rocky paths, have tried living independently but it did not seem to work on their first attempt.

