

## **Active Support: Maximising Lucy's Choice and Control**

25 year old Lucy relishes her independence. As well as holding down a part-time job, she volunteers, has a boyfriend and lives in her own flat. Although she has Asperger's syndrome, Lucy does not consider herself disabled, but does sometimes find it hard to keep on top of her self-sufficient lifestyle.

Here one of her support workers explains how using active support, her team has given Lucy the confidence to take control of her life...

"We only started supporting Lucy three months ago. Before we came along, her parents were concerned about how she was coping with running her own home. At this time, Lucy was receiving one hour's support at both ends of the day, plus an hour's support later in the week to go shopping. Although the aim of this support was to teach her the life skills she needed to live independently, she was actually struggling to keep her house in order. Rather than teaching her how to cook, the staff were cooking microwave meals for her. And she was hoarding everything, from leftovers to rubbish.

We decided the best way of instigating a change in Lucy's lifestyle was to sit down and discuss what was and wasn't working with her and her parents. We asked her what made a good day and what made a bad day. One thing that wasn't working was the structured 'To do' list she had for everyday things. Different jobs were allocated for every day, such as hoovering on Mondays or cleaning the windows on Tuesdays. Lucy leads a very busy life so having a specific job for each day did not necessarily take into account the other things that might come up. We developed a new one which simply listed all of the things that needed doing that week, and asked her to tick off each one as she did it.

As well as enabling Lucy to take control of looking after her home in her own way, we also developed a routine with Lucy that complemented her lifestyle more naturally.

For example, Lucy was sometimes missing her morning bath, but we didn't know why. When we asked her, she explained that she worried about missing her bus or being late on the days she worked. So instead of cutting the baths out, we suggested she adapt the routine so that she bathes in the evening on those days.

When it came to helping Lucy with mealtimes, we agreed to help her write a weekly menu and shop only for what she needed. This cut down the amount of out of date food she had in the fridge and reduced the amount of waste in the rubbish bins. We also suggested she write dates on any plastic tubs of leftovers so she could control how long to keep things for.

When it came to cooking, we realised all Lucy needed was to be given the opportunity to take control. When she asked us what to do, we would ask her what she thought she should do. As we anticipated, she already knew the

answer to her own question but was so used to things being done for her, rather than with her, that she had never had the confidence to give it a go.

After one month of changes, we met with Lucy and her parents once more to review how things were going. The new routine we had developed with Lucy was working and her house was now much more comfortable. She was getting on so well, in fact, that when we arrived to help prepare dinner, she had already done it without us! We had noticed that on the days her boyfriend stayed over, she did not really need or want us around. She enjoyed looking after him and would naturally get the flat looking nice before he came. So we decided, with agreement from her parents, to reduce the hours of support we provided.

Now that Lucy can do more everyday things without us, we use the time we have with her more productively. Although she has mastered cooking the meals from her weekly menu, she does not think to try new things. The same goes for other areas of her life. We hope to work on this in the future.

On the surface, the support we've given Lucy may seem very minor. But active support is almost always about the little things that make a big difference in giving people control to do things for themselves. With Lucy, it was more important to talk her through what to do and why, rather than show her through actions. She needed routine, but it had to be one designed around her. And it had to be consistent to work.

Lucy is now confident and proud of what she can do for herself. And she isn't scared to be assertive and tell us what she wants. She has become the independent woman she always wanted to be."