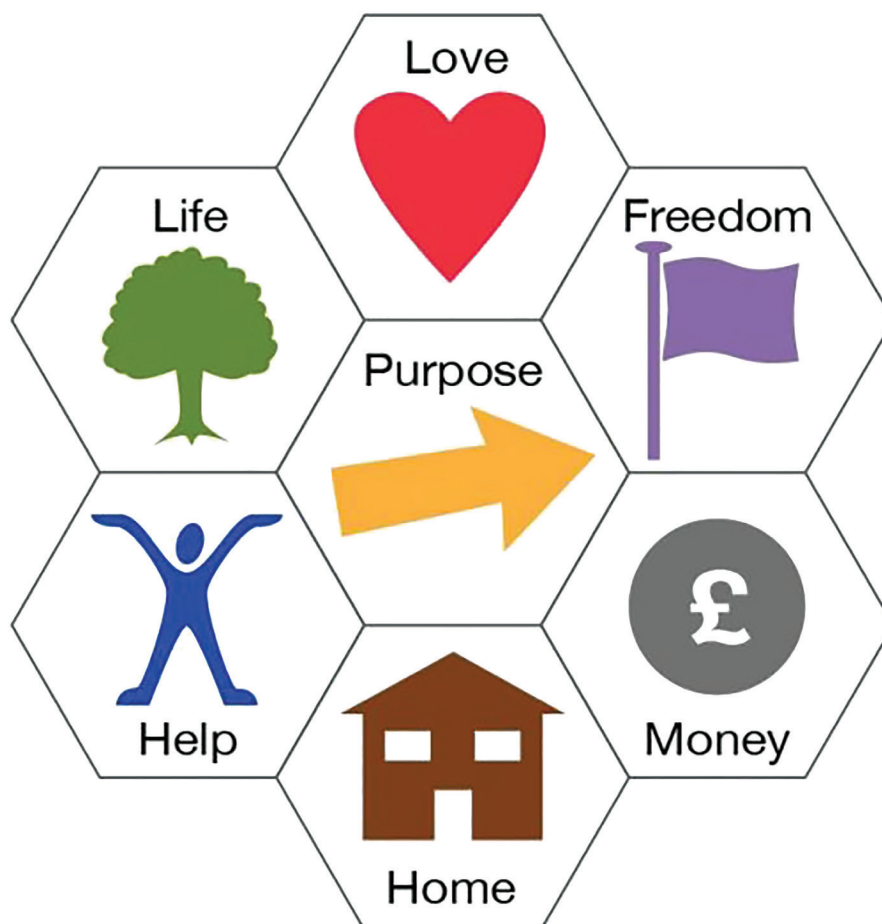


The 7 Keys to Citizenship



Feedback from lived-experience experts
in the North East and North Cumbria

2021 - 2024

Introduction

The Seven Keys to Citizenship are:



Purpose: having goals and setting the direction of your own life.



live life with freedom.

Freedom: being in control of your own life.

live life with enough money.



Money: having enough to live on.



live life with a place to call home.

Home: having a place where you belong.

live life helping each other.



Help: getting good help from other people.



live life joining in.

Life: getting stuck in and making a difference.



live life with love.

Love: finding friendship, love, and family.

The Inclusion North Citizenship Team spoke to people with a learning disability, autistic people, and family carers living in the North East and North Cumbria.

We collected their feedback about the 7 Keys to Citizenship.

We thought about:

- What is working well?
- What is not working well?
- What could make things better?
- What the 7 keys mean to them.

The Seven Keys to Citizenship was developed by Simon Duffy and Wendy Perez. More information about them can be found here:

<https://citizen-network.org/library/keys-to-citizenship2.html>

Note: The views and recommendations expressed in this report represent feedback shared by experts-by-experience and reflections on this feedback by Inclusion North. We are not speaking on behalf of the ICB, and the contents of the report do not necessarily reflect the ICB's views.



Freedom



Freedom

What is the Freedom Key?

The Freedom Key is all about people having control over their own lives and being able to make decisions, make mistakes, and live their life in the way they want to.

With the right approaches, everyone can be supported to feel in control.

How did we collect this information?

68 people completed an online questionnaire. Not everyone answered all of the questions.

Who Gave Feedback?

Of the 68 people who responded, 72% were people with a learning disability, autistic people, or both and 28% were family carers. Most people were aged between 31 – 40 but the ages ranged from 21 up to 70. The people responding came from 10 different local authorities, with most responses from North Cumbria and Northumberland.

The Feedback

What is working well?

“Can’t really think of much apart from our area has an advisory group that works with adult social care this has been successful in many ways.”

“I have strong family support. I’m currently on Universal Credit and teach English online. I rent my own house. I can decide how much I socialise. I can avoid people when I need to, I have coping mechanisms for sensory overload”

“Social prescribing services”

What isn’t working well?

Lack of Support

People said that a lack of support, particularly mental health support, was having a negative impact on their feelings of freedom.

“I cannot find any autism specific support for my mental health.”

“Well, I am not getting support off anyone - so everything.”

“I don’t think I have a life. I am just putting time in until I die, I haven’t got the nerves to commit suicide.”

“I feel very lonely a lot of the time - very isolated.”

Transport Restrictions

People said that transport issues were impacting their feelings of freedom.

“Bus services being reduced.”

“Meetings being held at times when a bus pass can’t be used.”

“My quality of life is poor. Bus cuts are the main problem.”

“Having to get to places for arranged meetings before I’m able to use my bus pass.”

Staffing Shortages

People said that staff shortages and carers being under tight time scales was impacting their freedom.

“Carers are up against a tight timetable, and do not stay the full time allotted to me if they are playing catch up.”

Other

People said they feel anxious about going to places like Job Centres because of the security on the door, which impacts their feeling of freedom in the community.

Other people said that not being able to live alone makes them feel less free.

What would make things better?

“A better system for the Doctors surgery – a walk in system like it used to be.”

“For people with autism who don’t want to visit the Job Centre they could have a meeting on Zoom or Teams instead.”

“People not seeing my age and assuming what someone my age should be able to do.”

Conclusion and Recommendation

We got less feedback about freedom than any other key. This suggests that people need more support to understand what freedom means, what freedom looks and feels like for them, and what they need to feel more free.

The feedback we did collect shows that transport cuts, staffing shortages, inaccessible environments, and lack of support are all negatively impacting on people’s feelings of freedom.

Purpose



Purpose

What is the Purpose Key?

The Purpose Key is all about people feeling as though their life has meaning, and finding a path in life that fits with their passions, interests, abilities, and goals.

How did we collect this information?

We collected responses from people using a questionnaire looking specifically at life/community and purpose. Responses came from 9 different local authority areas across the North East and North Cumbria, with most of the responses coming from Northumberland.

59 people responded to the questionnaire. Of those people, 69% said they were part of a group in their community, 26% said they weren't, and 5% didn't respond to this question.

The Feedback

What gives you a sense of purpose and why is that important to you?

Personal Goals

38% of people said that their **personal goals and happy ordinary living** gave them a sense of purpose.

"The thought of moving house someday. This is important to me because I'm tired of living in the same house and street for too long."

"To find out more about myself and figure out where I need to be in life. I was not able to do this for half my life which is why it is important to me."

"Walk dogs, going to day centre, cleaning and tidying house and garden."

"Transition journey."

"Living life to the fullest by trying to socialise and get out of the house."

"Being able to move and explore my environment. I like constant and changing activities."

"Being me."

"Nature – beauty of birds."

Helping others

23% of people said that being part of something, giving back, helping others, making a difference and following a passion, gave them a sense of purpose.

"I feel like I am helpful to the community due to the volunteering work I do."

"Making a difference."

"Feeling like I'm making the world a better place and making people happy."

"Changing things."

Relationships and Kindness

17% said that friendships, family, relationships, and the kindness of people, gave them a sense of purpose, and 10% said that being included and listened to, gave them a sense of purpose.

Unsure

29% of people said that they were unsure what gives them purpose, they didn't know, or didn't respond to this question.

What is a typical day in your life?

People told us what a typical day looks like for them. Some examples included:

- School
- Gaming
- Seeing family and friends
- Going to a day service
- Walking dogs
- Shopping

"Wake up get dressed go to school and do work, go home relax and go to sleep."

"Walking my dogs, attending a day service, seeing my family."

"Wake up and get my medication, get ready and dressed and have your breakfast, go out to your choice of activity for the day, excited to go on my guitar and gadgets, excited to go home for the weekend."

"Carer on morning for five days, carer every evening for tea call, potter around bungalow, shopping go to group."

"Going out for a drive, doing my wordsearch and sleep all morning."

"Someone makes me a coffee, I dress myself and choose my own clothes, my sister makes my breakfast, I watch cartoons."

People told us they enjoy spending their spare time doing different things such as going to funfairs, gaming, watching films, meeting friends, playing sports, jigsaws, going for walks, surfing, art projects, and travelling.

What is your ambition and what support would you need to achieve this ambition?

People gave us examples of their ambitions. They ranged from every day ambitions that many of us may have, to bigger ambitions relating to more specific interests. For example:

“Go on holiday, work at funfair.”

“I would like to get good at tennis.”

“Get job in theatre.”

“Learning how to drive.”

“Travel to places with animals.”

“To live life to the fullest and be a helpful member of society, be happy and feel fulfilled.”

“I want to be the first autistic miss universe.”

Sadly, some people’s ambitions reflected unmet support and accessibility needs. For example:

“To be included in activities, sense of community involvement.”

“Getting my mental health better.”

“Would like to support and improve my skills.”

“Get help for my mental health and go from there.”

“I was sad and sorry I didn’t get a job to make tea for older people. I would like a chance to do this job, it would make me happy. I don’t know how to make this happen.”

“To live independently with support.”

“See more open access for disabled people from opening gates to toilets.”

“To get a partner by meeting someone in a safe and nice space.”

“My ambition would be to get help with my speech.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a definite need to support people to understand what it means to have purpose, and what their goals, ambitions, and purpose might be. More than a quarter of the people we spoke to were unable to identify what gives them purpose – how are people ever going to be able to reach for and achieve their goals if they don’t know what they are?

It is striking that people’s goals, ambitions, and purpose, for the most part, are wonderfully ordinary things which society should be able to provide. We must ensure that all disabled people are able to access the support and the provision that they require, so that their ambitions and goals can reflect their true desires rather than addressing unmet needs.

We must encourage people with a learning disability and autistic people to explore broad and ambitious opportunities for their purpose and dreams.

Money



Money

What is the Money Key?

The Money Key is all about people having the means to be independent and achieve their goals.

How did we collect this information?

We held workshops with people with a learning disability, autistic people (or both), and family carers. We asked them questions, chatted, and collected their views.

We did this with the support of these organisations:

- Darlington Association for Disability
- Hartlepool Carers
- Pottergate Centre Day Services
- Bridge Creative
- Splinter Group

We also included some feedback from an online questionnaire completed by 68 people, where it was relevant to the Money Key.

The Feedback

Why do we need money?

People seemed to have a good understanding of why we need money.

People gave practical examples of necessities such as:

- Paying bills
- Buying food
- Paying for prescriptions
- Heating your home
- Keeping yourself secure in your home.
- Transport
- Personal items, hygiene products, nappies, and feminine hygiene
- Buying clothes and uniforms

People also talked about money as a means for leisure activities, enjoyment, experiences, and social connection, such as:

- Being able to go out and about/fun activities.
- Going to the gym.

- Having a holiday.
- To do the things you enjoy.
- Meet up with friends and go for coffee.
- Have nails done.
- Go to watch the football.

Finally, people provided some other reflections on what money means to them:

- “It secures your future.”
- “Freedom.”
- “Quality of life and mental health.”
- “Feel better.”
- “Power.”
- “Money can cause upset. I don’t like to talk about it. I don’t think the world should be all about money. Does money buy family or love or care? No, it doesn’t. My animals and my family mean more to me than money”.

How easy is it for you to manage your money?

Some people said they managed their own money and the found it easy.

People talked about the things they do to manage their money, and what can make it easier. For example:

- Make a budget, pay bills first and see what you have left, prioritise what’s important.
- “Using foodbanks helps.”
- “Being conscious of turning things off.”

- “Concessions for disabled people helps.”
- People said they found direct debits, receipts and bank statements helpful.
- People said that having smart meters helps, and thermometers in the house to turn the heating down and save money.

Other people said that they have support to help them manage their money.

“Carers look after my budget and when it’s gone its gone.”

“I don’t look after my own money. I would waste it.”

“Someone advocates for me.”

“Need help from parents or the bank.”

Some people said they found it very hard to manage money.

“Not allowed a card for security.”

“Very hard – people have explained it to me a million times over the years, but I am only just getting used to it. My confidence has gotten better when it comes to finance. I had to concentrate very hard when I was speaking to the bank teller about a new account.”

“I rather someone else looked after my money I made that choice.”

Can I spend my money on what I want?

Some people said that they could not spend their money on what they want, because the cost of living has gone

up, so it is more difficult to budget and more of their money is being spent on bills, food, and other expenses.

“I used to be quite good at saving up but since the cost of living my finances are a shambles.”

Other people said that they have good months and bad months, they still need to budget, and it depends on the circumstances. Some people said that they have to ask their carer/mum or request their own money from the person who looks after it.

“I can spend my own money but if I want to go on holiday I have to pay for my carer’s accommodation and food and the care cost on top so I can’t really afford that.”

Some people said that they did feel as though they could spend their money on what they wanted. People said they liked spending their money on DVDs, nights out, and going to the bingo.

Do you know what you are entitled to?

Some people said that they did understand.

“I understand what eligibility means. I know you are eligible by law. Therefore, I can get what I am eligible for.”

“I know what benefits I am allowed PIP.”

Some people said they use social media to learn more about what benefits they might be able to claim. Other people

said they learn about it from others in their support group.

Some feedback was that information about benefits can be difficult to understand, and websites for claiming can be complicated. In one group that we spoke to, all of the people said they didn’t understand what they were entitled to. People suggested that having accessible information about benefits would be helpful.

“You have to find out what you’re entitled to and that can be difficult.”

“I do not know what I am entitled to, but I would like to find out.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Everyone has been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Disabled people will be impacted even more – it is estimated that the extra cost of disability is equivalent to 63% of household income after housing costs.

It is important that disabled people are able not only to pay for their essentials (e.g. food, bills, personal care) but also to have reasonable means to enjoy life and take part in activities that bring them joy.

A clear recommendation from this feedback is that more support is needed for disabled people to understand how to manage money, and to understand what they are entitled to, and that this support should be accessible in its format and delivery.

Home



Home

What is the Home Key?

The Home Key is all about people having a place to call home where they have privacy, be with the people who matter to them, and where they feel they belong.

How did we collect this information?

We held workshops with people with a learning disability, autistic people (or both), and family carers. We asked them questions, chatted, and collected their views.

We did this with the support of these organisations:

- Darlington Association for Disability
- Hartlepool Carers
- Pottergate Centre Day Services
- Bridge Creative
- Splinter Group

We also included some feedback from an online questionnaire completed by 68 people, where it was relevant to the Home Key.

The Feedback

Why is home important?

Freedom and Independence

The overwhelming response to this question was around people having a sense of independence, freedom, control, and having a safe space where they feel they belong. People talked about being able to come and go as they want, not having a curfew, reading in their bedroom late at night, being able to ask people to leave, and decorating the way they like.

“You have your own freedom, put your own security measures on and have whatever pet you want.”

“I can make my own decisions.”

“I can live on my own. My home gives me privacy.”

“I can be myself at home and have personal expression.”

“Independence”

“I can have my photos up.”

“It’s good for my mental health – an escape from the world.”

“Freedom of speech in my own home.”

“I’m proud of it. It gives me a sense of achievement because I have come from being homeless to living in a rough area to being in a place where I am happy and have decorated it really nicely on a budget. It demonstrates my journey.”

Safety, Security, and Support

People also talked about a home being a place of safety and security. Somewhere to keep your valuables, somewhere to keep you safe, and a roof over your head.

People described home as a place that is comfortable, warm, cosy. They used words like comfort, belonging and memories. People enjoy sharing space with the people they love such as family members and pets.

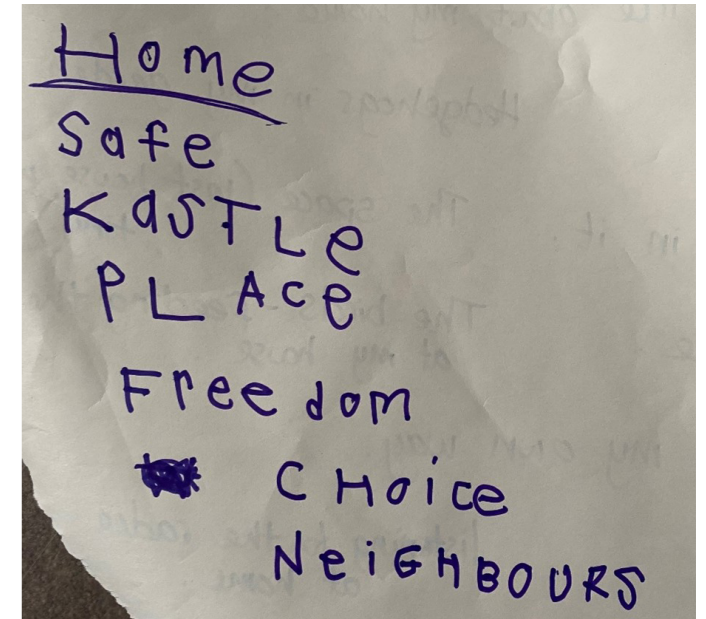
“It’s comfortable, safe, has my family to keep me company.”

“It’s our castle.”

But some people also talked about not wanting to rely on the family home, and that being independent in their own home is important to them.

“It’s not really my home, it’s my childhood home.”

“I don’t want to live with my parents all of my life. I want my parents to have their own life and do what they want and not having to worry about me.”



What Helps People to Feel Safe at Home?

Area and Community

People said they feel safe in a “nice area” that is quiet and peaceful with no crime.

People said that they want to have “peace of mind” where they live. Community and having nice neighbours were important to many people.

“Peace and quiet – no noise from the neighbours. I used to live in a place where lots of drug dealing was happening and doors were banging all day long and that didn’t make me feel safe.”

“I know some neighbours I’ve known them for years. The crime rate is low.”

Practical Security Measures

Lots of people talked about practical security measures that help them to feel safe. This included:

- Cameras and security/CCTV

- Closing curtains
- Door being locked
- Warden controlled
- Pets
- Outside lights
- Ring door bell
- Mobile phone
- Having alarms
- Items that make us feel safe like blankets (Weighted blankets)
- Having the internet
- Telecare

People also said that having home comforts and everything working in the home (e.g. heating) helps them to feel safe.

Safe People

People said that having safe people around them helps them to feel safe. People such as family, either living in the house or visiting, and pets. People also said that it makes them feel safe if they are in control of who is in their home, not having too many people round and being left alone.

What would People Change about their Home?

Some of the people we spoke to felt that they would like to live in a “nicer area with good neighbours”. They said it would be good if there were street lights in their area, and less antisocial behaviour – drugs, noise, and crime.

Someone said that they needed their grass cutting but they were struggling to get support with this. Someone else said they needed support with cooking and housework.

“There is also a shortage of carers to provide outreach, so she is stuck in the house 24/7 at weekend and school holidays.”

People said that owning a home, making changes to it, and paying bills, is expensive. Another person said that their home was mouldy and not in a good state.

“Service charges can be a lot on top of rent, so reduce these.”

Other people said that they wanted to find their own home, but that there is a lack of housing available and long waiting lists.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The feedback highlights just how important it is for people to feel independent, and

in control of their home and their safe space. It is really important to people to have a home in a community and neighbourhood that feels safe to them, and it’s also important to have a support network as well as opportunities for alone time and privacy.

When professionals are supporting a person into a home, and creating a

support package, the above elements should be considered as important factors of the decision making and planning process. Finding a home for someone should include a thorough and person-centred consultation process. The person’s wishes and feelings should be adhered to wherever possible.

Questions to ask:

- Would I accept this home/living arrangement for myself or a loved one?

- Would I feel safe here? Would it feel safe for a loved one to live here?
- Does this living arrangement promote the persons citizenship or hinder it?
- Do they have enough support in place to meet their needs, feel empowered, and promote their human rights?



Help



Help

What is the Help Key?

The Home Key is all about people having a place to call home where they have privacy, be with the people who matter to them, and where they feel they belong.

How did we collect this information?

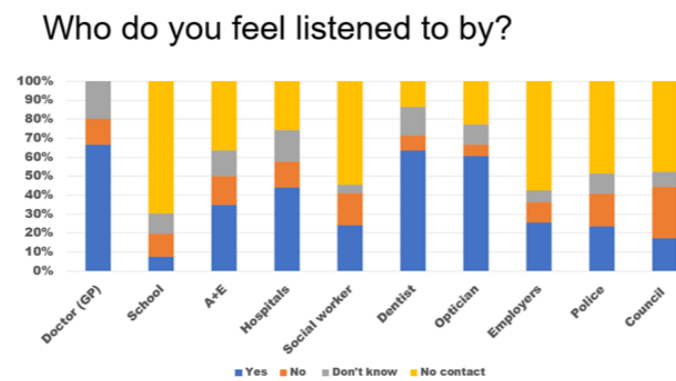
68 people completed an online questionnaire. Not everyone answered all of the questions.

Who Gave Feedback?

Of the 68 people who responded, 72% were people with a learning disability, autistic people, or both and 28% were family carers. Most people were aged between 31 – 40 but the ages ranged from 21 up to 70. The people responding came from 10 different local authorities, with most responses from North Cumbria and Northumberland.

The Feedback

We asked people, which professionals have made them feel listened to. The results are below.



People felt most listened to by doctors, dentists, and opticians. People felt the least listened to by schools, councils, social workers, employers, and police.

What is working well?

People talked about the importance of support from family, personal assistants, employers, friends and social care providers.

“I know where to find information and have people I can approach for help.”

“Occupational health support through my employer (Tesco).”

“I get support from Triple A who run a friendship group and provide me with 1-1 support from one of their Navigators when I feel overloaded and need help.”

“I meet new people from Friends Action.”

“My P.A. is good but not much to do in the community for autistic older people.”

“People check in with me often.”

“I get support from a company called Percy House every day.”

“Support from social care provider.”

“The support I have from my local carers service.”

“My family support me.”

What isn't working well?

People talked about there being a lack of support for complex needs/respite, autism, finances, transitions from child to adult services, staffing availability, and mental health.

“Lack of respite care provision appropriate for her complex needs. We have searched North East wide and there is nowhere that can provide a secure building and garden. She is a high-risk absconder.”

“There is not enough financial help in this area of the country. There is no childcare support. No help for travel for myself who has autism and can't drive. Struggling as a single mother, on benefits, dealing with trauma, going

through court proceedings, and have ADHD and autism. There is absolutely no respite or funding for childcare until she is 2.5 years old. I have been told my two options are, struggling through and take antidepressants if it gets too hard or give her up to social services.”

“Young people who have aged out of CAMHS are assumed to be able to negotiate systems as an adult and support is not there to help with transition.”

“I don't receive all the support hours I should due to staff shortages. I am meant to have eight hours a day one-to-one support and 3 core hours support. I get three hours some days 1 hour one to one support.”

“As someone who is self-aware, intelligent and articulate it is very difficult to get any kind of support. The services available are tailored towards people who lack skills and knowledge where I need help to navigate society. My support is based upon self-help and motivation. When my mental health is poor, I am left without any help at all, and it can be extremely difficult to push myself through it especially when I am a carer for my Autistic son.”

“My mental health is struggling due to people not understanding autism and how it impacts on my ability to do everyday tasks.”

“Staff leave without saying goodbye. This makes me feel sad that I was not valued enough or important enough to even say goodbye.”

“I think there is very little support

available from “the system” - from my GP, or from social services. What support I receive comes from a local charity called Triple-A, who run a friendship group called Positive Pals and who provide me with 1-1 support from one of their Navigators when I am feeling overloaded and need help.”

What would make things better?

More Information about the Support Available

“Knowing where to go for support and it being readily available. Once a child is diagnosed by CAMHS they close off the support.”

“More information around available local support networks.”

More Respite Support

“If there was somewhere safe where I could put my daughter just for one day per month where I could do something nice for myself or catch up on rest, without having to attend a course in return.”

“For the local or regional authority to build and commission a specialist respite service for young adults with complex autism - and to make the premises and garden secure!”

More Understanding and Autism Specific Support

“More support, more understanding of how autism impacts everyday living. Feel less isolated.”

“People understanding my situation and accommodating to my needs.”

Other

People said that support with food and exercise would be really helpful. People said that there should be more collaboration and working together when thinking about support and services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The feedback suggests that lots of people are feeling unsupported and that they do not have all the help they need. Mental health and complex care support, particularly for those with diverse needs such as autism, seems to be a key issue.

Recommendations would be:

- To invest in enhanced and/or increased support options.
- Improved understanding of autism (particularly in mental health services).
- To include consultation and co-production with experts by experience as part of service design and planning.



Life

What is the Life Key?

The Life Key is all about people feeling part of a community, contributing, giving back, joining in, buying, or working.

How did we collect this information?

We collected responses from people using a questionnaire looking specifically at life/community and purpose. Responses came from 9 different local authority areas across the North East and North Cumbria, with most of the responses coming from Northumberland.

59 people responded to the questionnaire. Of those people, 69% said they were part of a group in their community, 26% said they weren't, and 5% didn't respond to this question.

The Feedback

How would you find out what was going on in your community?

14% of people didn't know how to find information. Only 5% said they got this information from either a social worker (3%) or their doctor (2%) and 12% mentioned getting this information from “staff” (e.g. the staff in their home).

The vast majority of people reported using a range of informal methods, including:

- Social media and internet
- Family and friends
- Noticeboards, posters, and newsletters
- Community centres, support organisations and community groups
- Gossip and word of mouth

What does community mean to you?

Here is a word cloud that shows what “community” means to people:



“A place that make people laugh, a place where people mostly sing, a place that make people happy and included.”

“People around me that share the same hobbies, that understand what I’m going through, friends and families and neighbours.”

“Feeling involved and less alone.”

“Having someone to help and talk to.”

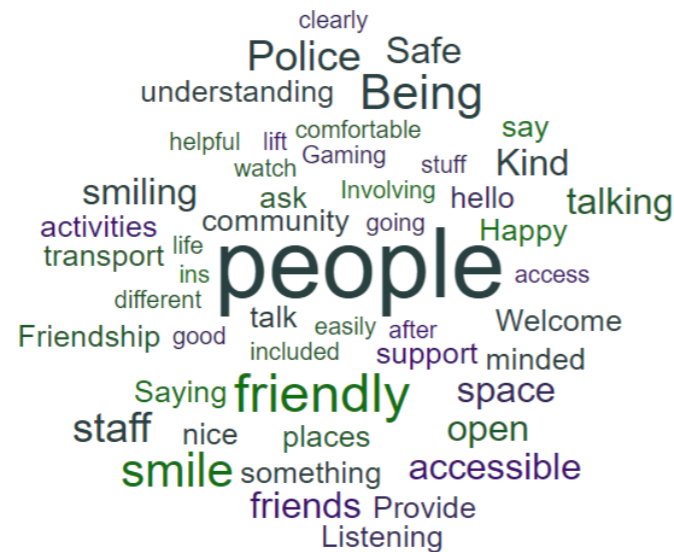
“Being able to functionally contribute to something and being a part of it. For my voice to be heard.”

“It means being myself freely.”

“Doing something that I enjoy. Meeting people, sharing same interests.”

“I can make friends and grow into who I am and to be better.”

What are some things that a community does that makes you feel safe, welcome and included?



37% of people mentioned that they feel safe, welcomed, and included simply by people smiling, saying hello, or being friendly.

What barriers are there to feeling included in your community?

The most commonly mentioned barrier (27%) was people not feeling safe, and having experiences of hate crime, prejudice, ignorance, and people taking advantage.

“Sometimes its prejudice against age, sexuality and disability.”

“When I’m in town, when I’m on my own and I feel nervous so I never know if someone will steal your phone.”

“Race and colour.”

People said that a big barrier is a lack of suitable activities and opportunities within the community (23%).

“Not a lot of inclusive clubs for teenagers with additional needs.”

“Some activities aren’t suited for my age. Sometimes I feel confused and overwhelmed by everything.”

People said that a lack of understanding, accessibility, and reasonable adjustments could be a barrier (17%) as well as issues with transport and geography (15%).

“I am unable to speak so cannot talk to members of my community.”

“Only 1 wheel chair place.”

“Not allowing dogs in some places, disabled toilets.”

“Called names on the bus.”

“Rural communities and lack of transport.”

What would you want to see happening in your community that isn’t happening now?

69% of people said that having more options for community activities would be good. Examples that people gave included:

- Gaming groups
- Writing, acting, book group, dance, and creative arts
- Football, sports, and walking groups

13% of people mentioned improved accessibility, understanding, and inclusion. 4% mentioned having more reliable transport.

“More education for the public about LGBTQ+.”

“Buses with 2 wheelchairs and reduce gap on boarding metro.”

“Address ableism and sexism.”

“More public toilets, more resting seats.”

“Geographical/mapping of routes for wheelchair.”

“Accommodations for people with sensory sensitivities.”

“More provision to learn sign language.”

What support would help you get more involved within your community?

“I need one to one support at all times. If this was available in my community, it would mean that I could be involved without reliance on my parents.”

“Not to be discriminated upon, especially when up and about in the community.”

“Making things accessible.”

“I have support workers but there is nothing to attend.”

“Encouragement.”

“Having more support workers in community hubs.”

“Feeling okay and I know making the right choices. For examples guiding me in the right direction.”

“More travel buddies, more independent travel training.”

“Knowing I would feel safe when involved as well as understood.”

“A quiet space for when overwhelmed, people who are more trained to work with people like me.”

“More groups provided, more opportunities to help, lead and help in workshops myself, more chances to get to know people outside of groups.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the feedback, it seems that one of the key barriers to people feeling a part of their community, is safety. Many people reported experiencing harassment, prejudice, or just feeling unsafe in the community environment.



The feedback also suggests that one of the key ways that disabled people can be supported to feel safer in the community, is simply by people being friendly, saying hello, and smiling.

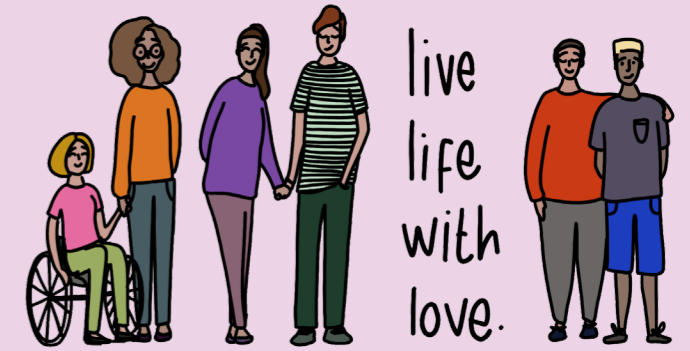
Another key barrier to community inclusion is lack of opportunities and available activities, as well as the need to improve accessibility, understanding, and reasonable adjustments within community environments.

Key recommendations:

- Explore how communities can be made safer for disabled people.
- Empower disabled people with information and support about how to keep safe in the community and how to get help.
- Increase the number of community activities available for disabled people.
- Explore how accessibility, inclusion, and reasonable adjustments can be improved in the community.



Love



Love

What is the Love Key?

The Love Key is all about people having the chance to form relationships, friendships, find lovers, and make a family.

How did we collect this information?

We met with groups of experts by experience from Newcastle, Gateshead, and Chester-Le-Street. We also collected responses from people using an online questionnaire.



The Feedback

What do you like to do with Friends?

People told us they like to do lots of different things with friends, such as going for coffee or a meal, hanging out and chatting, going to the cinema, gaming, group activities, and going to the pub!

“I like to expand my circle of friends all the time. There are many different places out and about I like to go to from countryside to coast. I like watching films, playing games, going to visit places of historic interest and places with animals.”

“Seeing my friends as it is good for my mental health and meeting new people.”

What makes a good friend?



People said that a good friend is someone with similar interests and experiences, who is kind, honest and trustworthy. Someone who you can have fun with, who will make you smile and cheer you up, and you can be there for each other.

Some people said that they thought it was important that a good friend is patient.

Others said that a good friend is someone who “doesn’t shout at you” and “who doesn’t ask you for money”.

“They are there for you when you need them.”

“You can learn from each other.”

“They make you feel happy.”

“A good true friend must have the qualities of being trustworthy, reliable, honest, patient, etc. We can share experiences together and help direct each other down the appropriate paths in order to achieve our ambitions. But I learn to be respectful and remember not everyone likes the same things.”

Why is Friendship important?

Lots of people said that friendship is important for happiness and to stop people feeling alone.

“If you didn’t have friends, you would be lost and alone.”

“Having no friends is bad for your mental health.”

“If you didn’t have friends, you would be suicidal.”

“Life is better when you are not alone.”

Lots of people also said that having friends means having people who are there for you and can support you. For many people, it was important to have someone outside of their family to talk to.

“Someone to talk to that is not family.”

“You can talk to friends about stuff that you can’t talk to family about.”

“You can support each other.”

“They can help you in tough times.”

“Friends don’t judge you.”

Finally, people said that friends are important because they are fun to be around and spend time with.

“It makes you feel good hanging out with friends.”

“Life is boring without friends.”

“Go out and about.”

What stops people from making friends?

Lots of people (41%) said that **confidence and anxiety** around friendships was a big barrier. People said they were worried about things going wrong, previous bad experiences, and the complexities of navigating relationships.

“Bad experiences in the past.”

“Being worried that people will be nasty.”

“Arguing and being nasty.”

“Confidence and having learning difficulties.”

“Worried things will go wrong.”

“Nervous to meet new people or go to new places.”

People (24%) said that a **lack of support** was a barrier, as well as **not understanding** how to make friends, where to go, or how to travel to places and access the community.

“Not enough support for people with learning disabilities.”

“Not knowing what places to go to or how to approach people.”

“Nervous about travel.”

“Not having enough staff or staff hours.”

Other people mentioned **money and lack of transport/geography**, as a barrier (20%) and others (8%) said that the **closure of services/lack of options** was an issue.

What support do you think people need to make friends?

People gave us lots of different ideas of things that might help. For example:

- Staffing support, or support from family (20%)
- Having safe spaces in the community to meet people (15%)
- Support with confidence and social skills (15%)
- Practical skills around meeting friends, such as planning in advance, deciding where to meet, deciding where to go, and keeping in touch with people (13%)
- Skills for finding out information about places – using the library, using the internet, and e-safety (13%)
- Travel training and how to use travel apps and tools (10%)
- Money and budgeting support (8%)



What is Love?



- “Getting married.”
- “Holding hands.”
- “Being safe and feeling secure.”
- “Being happy together.”
- “Making memories you will remember forever.”
- “My Mum and Dad.”
- “Sharing life together.”
- “It can be friendship or family or a boyfriend or girlfriend.”
- “Being with a cat at present as no humans love me.”

What do you love about yourself?

Some people talked about loving **who they are** and being proud of themselves:

- “Just being me.”

“My selflessness, compassion and my growing confidence.”

“My Autism. It is a gift, that enhances the other gifts I have, or wouldn’t have without my Autism.”

“I am proud to have a learning disability.”

Other people talked about the **relationships**, and how they help others:

“Having people that enjoy my company.”

“I am a good uncle and help my sister.”

“I’m very good at helping other people.”

People told us about the **skills and qualities** they have that they love about themselves:

- “I’m a kind person.”
- “I’m good at photography.”
- “I love my shoes.”
- “I’m good at singing.”
- “My sense of humour.”
- “I have lovely manners.”

A quote from one of the people we spoke to...

“I would say it (friendship) can be tough. Not easy. But with everything time will do its thing and bring numerous people into your life. As long as you are a confident and a good person, shouldn’t have a problem. Love is harder especially to find someone who loves you. But what I’ve found easier is to love yourself. Then you can grow into the best you. And whoever you find, will love you for who you are.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

People with a learning disability and autistic people have a right to loving relationships, friendships, sex, and the opportunity to make a family if they wish to.

A clear recommendation from this feedback is that work needs to be done to support autistic people and people with a learning disability to build their confidence in socialising and with life skills for accessing the community and meeting people safely. We must provide suitable, accessible, and safe spaces in the community where people can connect and build lives together.



