

Autism & Homelessness Toolkit Review, by Pat.

This toolkit ([https://westminsterhhcp.org/Resources\(4\)/Autism_Homelessness_Toolkit.pdf](https://westminsterhhcp.org/Resources(4)/Autism_Homelessness_Toolkit.pdf)) was prepared by a number of different individuals and organisations, including Dr. Alasdair Churchard, The National Autistic Society, Homeless Link and Resources for Autism. It also contains contributions from people with lived experience and all but one person's identity has been anonymised. The language used is the preferred language of the participants, which gives this toolkit an authenticity, some others may lack.

There is an increased awareness among researchers and practitioners, that autistic people are at a higher risk of homelessness than the general population. Added to this the fact that they are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation once they become homeless and it's clear there is a need for this toolkit, because it not only describes what Autism is, but also how to recognise it in your client/s, how to refer someone you may suspect is autistic and how to work with a client with autism. It also includes how you can assist someone with autism to take up and remain in accommodation.

Social work students may want to use this toolkit to gain an insight into people with autism and the particular issues faced by them in relation to homelessness. Practitioners and teaching staff may wish to use this resource as part of the teaching process, it can be used in presentations, or workshops, such as the one I presented, on Autism, Ageing and Homelessness, at the recent Social Work Conference on September 26th 2019. I am aware that autism doesn't always feature in the social work curriculum so this toolkit is invaluable in helping to inform students about autism, it's impact upon people who are homeless, many of whom they may meet during their social work practice and how to support these individuals, not only in terms of their diagnosis, but also in relation to helping them access suitable accommodation and sustain their tenancy in the long term.

It's important to realise that people with autism have strengths, for example, they may be very good at I.T. or have a good eye for detail. They are very often reliable and truthful, or have an excellent memory and I am glad to see that this toolkit mentions this, because it is easy to focus on what someone with autism can't do, or rather, our perceptions of what someone with autism can't do. Often the media portrayal of people with autism is a negative one, so we need to remember that every individual with autism is different to everyone else with autism and that goes for our strengths and difficulties.

The needs of someone with autism vary quite a lot, in that some people like me, can live independently, with very little need for support. Someone else may need to live in supported accommodation with 24-hour support. Sadly, such support is often not available, or it's not tailored to the individual's specific needs and because autistic people can struggle to gain sustainable housing and employment, they are probably more likely to be at a higher risk of homelessness. Therefore, it's important not only to address that risk, but to take a holistic, person centred approach to providing support to this client group.

This toolkit can help students and practitioners to understand the complex needs and issues inherent in this client group and to raise awareness among students and practitioners of the importance of providing tailored support to people with autism who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. I would like to see this toolkit incorporated into the social work teaching curriculum, because it provides clear, comprehensive information on this topic. I hope it will be used as a resource by students and practitioners alike to help inform best practice in this area of social work.