

For immediate release. With two images.

## **Adults with autism enjoy independent home of their own**

SIX months on from its opening, residents of a house for young adults with autism in Southbourne, Dorset are enjoying new-found independence and friendships.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people perceive the world and interact with others.

Aspire was opened by Inclusion Housing in March 2021, with the Christchurch-based charity Autism Wessex providing care to the people living there.

The modern house comprises three self-contained studio apartments, four en-suite bedrooms and communal areas and is designed specifically for adults with autism.

It enables them to live independently, with privacy, freedom and social interaction and their own tenancy agreements - alongside appropriate care from the staff team who help with things such as cooking, cleaning, housework, personal care, shopping and community activities.

Xavier, 18, was living with family before moving into Aspire in June.

He said: "I'm enjoying being independent and I'm not really struggling with anything so far. I've surprised myself.

"The team are there if I need them day or night.

"Eventually I want to get a full-time job so I can upgrade my phone, my internet and get a new bike."

Brandon, also aged 18, was living in foster care before moving into Aspire.

He said: "Knowing I have support if I need it is good. I'd also like to get a job and that now feels possible."

Some of the staff team at Aspire are also exploring new challenges.

Phil Donaldson previously worked as a chef in Poole before joining Aspire as a support worker.

During the Covid pandemic he looked for a career outside of hospitality which would enable him to spend more time with his wife and two sons, one of whom may be autistic and is currently awaiting assessment.

He said: "My sister-in-law works for Autism Wessex and told me I should apply to be a support worker. I didn't think I had what it takes but she assured me I had and I would also be given all the training I would need. I haven't looked back.

"As soon as I started, I made a connection with one of the people we support who likes gaming and I'm learning a lot about autism and how complex it can be. I've surprised myself with what I'm achieving and enjoying being part of a team learning together."

Sian Saunders, a former delivery driver, was looking for a new challenge and saw ads for support workers for Aspire online.

She said: “My Dad has a form of autism and I have always been able to recognise it and calm him down. I’m also around the same age as most of the young people here and I think they relate to me because of that.

“There is lots of training available and we have had workshops in everything from first aid to safeguarding and epilepsy.

“I feel well supported and that I’m now on a good career path.”

Steve Cade has been working as a Support worker at Aspire since June.

The former DJ and photographer has a background in the arts and disability therapy.

He said: “Our role is to keep a watchful eye over the residents’ self care, making sure we encourage them out of their rooms and that they are up and ready for college for example. It’s about knowing when to offer help and when not to and it’s rewarding to see how they are progressing, making friendships and adjusting to their new independence.”

Steve Drake is a former coach driver with Shearings Holiday company, which went into liquidation in lockdown.

He said: “I’ve done a little support work in supported living in the past and really enjoy the chance to help young people find their feet and achieve their potential.”

Mark Perry has previously worked with Autism Wessex in its Life Skills, residential and community departments.

He said: “Patience and empathy are really important in this role. We are all starting out together in a way. But it has been hugely inspiring to see some of our residents make a connection, start going to the shops together, having a laugh, going to the pub and generally bonding.

“Depending on their need they might go out and visit friends. But we also have two non-verbal residents who require one-to-one assistance.

“The ultimate aim is for our residents to be able to live independently if they can, but this takes as long as it takes and in the meantime we are here for them.”

Autism Wessex CEO Siún Cranny said: “Our approach is to work in partnership with our residents to support and empower them to lead more independent lives without sacrificing the level of support they receive.

“The progress of the residents and staff of Aspire so far has been very encouraging and we hope to develop more opportunities like this in the future.”

Ends

[www.autismwessex.org.uk](http://www.autismwessex.org.uk)

Picture captions:

Aspire 1 – Support team members at Aspire. Left to right – Steve Drake, Mark Perry, Sian Saunders and Steve Cade.

Aspire2 – Resident Xavier, 18, was living with family before moving into Aspire in June. He now hopes to get a full-time job.

**Information for Editors:**

Autism Wessex is the leading regional charity providing specialist education, care and support to children and adults affected by autism.

Media information: Debbie Granville, Deep South Media. Tel: 07884 657782 Email: [Debbie.granville@deepsouthmedia.co.uk](mailto:Debbie.granville@deepsouthmedia.co.uk)