

Inspectors praise charity for delivering choice, dignity and independence in supported living

Christchurch-based [Autism Unlimited](#) has been praised by Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors for enabling young adults with a range of special needs to live as independently as possible.

Inspectors visited the charity's four Community East supported living locations and awarded Good ratings across the board, with no recommendations for improvement.

Community East provides 12 people with autism, learning disabilities and mental health needs with a range of support with personal care at Aspire in Christchurch and in their own homes.

Inspectors tested each location against five CQC criteria - Caring, Safe, Responsive, Well-led and Effective.

Their report concluded: "Staff focused on people's strengths and promoted what they could do, so people had a fulfilling and meaningful everyday life.

"People and those important to them, including advocates, were involved in planning their care. People's quality of life was enhanced by the service's culture of improvement and inclusivity."

Manager Carla Hurst said: "Waiting for the outcome of any inspection is nerve-wracking. But we were told we had not only reached Good – the highest rating our services can meet – we are also meeting *every* requirement with no recommendations of what we could do better. We are obviously all thrilled."

She continued: "Some of the people we support require 24-hour, one-to-one or two-to-one support. Others are supported to learn skills they need to eventually live independently, like cooking, shopping and managing finances. All are also supported to access healthcare services and live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

"The whole staff team lives and breathes the service. It's not just a job to us and it's wonderful to be recognised for our commitment to the people we support."

Carla has personal experience of the challenges faced by autistic people and their families. One of her three children has a diagnosis of Autism and ADHD and one has a diagnosis of ADHD. She had sought advice from Autism Unlimited when her son was small.

She explained: "I contacted the charity's helpline for advice for one of my sons when he was young. There was so little help following an autism diagnosis then and I didn't know which way to turn. The charity signposted me to organisations which could help. Last year, when this job was advertised, I knew I had to apply and help other families.

"I have no doubt that my lived experience with autism helps me a lot in my role. I can empathise with the people we support and their families because I probably know what they are going through. I am a passionate advocate for people who have additional needs being able to live the lives they want and deserve."

The full report is available on the CQC website at: www.cqc.org.uk

To watch a YouTube video of a Day in the Life of an Autism Unlimited support worker visit: <https://youtu.be/WH9YHe7JVnw>

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Picture caption – Manager Carla Hurst (second from left), with the Autism Unlimited Community East team.

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