

Next Steps Ltd

# Next Steps Hertfordshire

## Inspection report

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### Ratings

#### Overall rating for this service

Good 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Good 

Is the service caring?

Outstanding 

Is the service responsive?

Good 

Is the service well-led?

Good 

### Overall summary

We carried out an inspection of Next Steps on 22 September 2015. This was an announced inspection where we gave the provider 48 hours' notice because we needed to ensure someone would be available to speak with us.

Next Steps provides services to adults with learning disabilities, autism and complex needs. People who used the service previously lived in hospital, long term residential care or had moved away from home for the first time. The service supported people to move to supported living services or their own homes so that they could live more independently. Where people were living in supported living services the owner and registered

manager lead projects with people, their families and health and social care professionals to design accommodation that was innovative and met people's individual needs. At the time of our inspection there were eleven people who received a service from the agency.

We last inspected the service on 11 February 2014 and found the provider was meeting the required standards at that time.

The service had a registered manager. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to manage the service. Like

# Summary of findings

registered providers, they are 'registered persons'. Registered persons have legal responsibility for meeting the requirements in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and associated Regulations about how the service is run.

People had confidence and were comfortable with the staff who worked with them and said they helped them feel safe. Staff knew their roles and responsibilities and were knowledgeable about the risks of abuse and reporting procedures.

There was a strong emphasis on providing care which focused on the individual. People were supported to plan their support and they received a service that was based on their personal needs and wishes. The service was flexible and responded positively to changes in people's

needs. People who had come from long term care facilities had taken control of their lives and had been supported to acquire and develop life skills and form links within the area where they lived.

People told us the service was well-led and that the culture of the service was about ensuring a high standard of care for each person. Care staff told us they enjoyed working for the service, they received good training and felt very well supported.

The owner and manager promoted co-working with everyone involved in people's care and were passionate about providing care tailored to each person enabling them to be empowered and have their voice heard. They went the extra mile in securing the right property and staff for each person referred. The culture of the service was open, constantly striving to improve and develop seeking and responding to people's feedback.

# Summary of findings

## The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

### Is the service safe?

The service was safe.

Staff recruitment was robust and the service operated a matching process with the aim of finding care staff who people would have common interests with. People told us they received a reliable and consistent service.

People were protected by staff who understood the safeguarding procedures and would report concerns.

People's medicines were managed safely.

Good



### Is the service effective?

The service was effective.

People were supported through a well planned transition period from long term care to supported living in a way which helped them to live a healthy and improved quality of life.

Staff were trained and supported and had the skills and knowledge to meet people's needs.

People were supported to enjoy a healthy diet.

People were supported to access a range of health care professionals to ensure that their general health was maintained.

Good



### Is the service caring?

The service was caring.

Staff were passionate about their work. They were described as kind and compassionate and promoted a happy, relaxed atmosphere.

People who used the service and their families described the care as excellent, saying care staff went the extra mile. People were supported to develop and maintain their independence and received support from a consistent team of care staff.

Staff listened to people and involved them in decisions about their lives.

People's privacy and dignity was promoted and respected. People, who had been in long term care for many years were encouraged to develop their own identity and supported to create their own home.

Outstanding



### Is the service responsive?

The service was responsive.

People's living arrangements and their care was designed and developed around their individual needs.

People worked with staff and people of their choice to plan how they were supported and the skills, interests and activities they wished to develop.

Good



# Summary of findings

People and their relatives were confident to raise any concerns and that they would be dealt with appropriately.

The owner and manager went, and encouraged staff to go the extra mile to meet people's needs in a professional and caring manner.

## Is the service well-led?

The service was well led.

The service had an open, positive culture shared by staff members and the people they supported.

The service had a registered manager who provided effective leadership which focussed on improving the quality of service for people.

The service promoted a positive and inclusive culture. People, their relatives and staff were encouraged to share their views and help develop the service.

The owner and manager were constantly striving to improve and develop the service.

**Good**



# Next Steps Hertfordshire

## Detailed findings

### Background to this inspection

We carried out this inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. This inspection was planned to check whether the provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, to look at the overall quality of the service, and to provide a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014.

This visit took place on 22 September 2015 and was carried out by one inspector. The visit was announced to ensure that relevant people were available to assist us with the

inspection. Before our inspection we reviewed information we held about the service and we contacted twelve health and social care professionals for their feedback and received responses from six.

During the inspection we met with the provider and the registered manager. We talked with seven people who used the service, visited three people in their homes, spoke with five care staff and one relative. We also looked at one person's care plan, reviewed five staff files and looked at documents linked to the day to day running of the agency including a range of policies and procedures. Following the inspection we spoke with a further two relatives.

# Is the service safe?

## Our findings

People felt safe and said how staff helped them feel comfortable and safe. The following are some of the comments from the conversation we had with seven people who used Next Steps. “I am very happy I feel comfortable with the people who stay with me. We work well together.”

“Staff make me feel safe they are good.” “This is my home and staff help me to live here and keep me safe”. Some people had lived for most of their lives in a hospital setting and had made the move to supportive living through Next Steps working in partnership with them, their families and health and social professionals.

The manager told us for many of the people who had moved from residential care, creating a weekly daily plan was an important part of their care. This ensured people knew what they were doing each day, which reduced anxiety and stress and helped people feel safe. People told us they sat with the staff and made a plan. One person said “They (staff) encourage me to do things and it is good”.

Staff were very aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding people. There were clear guidelines for staff to follow. Staff said they would not hesitate to report any issue of concern or use the whistleblowing policy if necessary and were confident in management dealing with it. There had been two occasions where safeguarding concerns had been identified and the relevant procedures had been followed. At the time of the inspection there were no safeguarding concerns.

Each person who used the service had a customer’s ‘whistleblowing’ document which described in an accessible way what to do if someone did not treat them properly. People said they were treated well by staff. One staff member said how the culture of treating people fairly and respecting everyone meant that sometimes people who used the service would tell each other not to speak in a particular way to another person.

As many staff worked on their own with people they supported they followed the service lone worker policy. All staff said they felt safe and well supported at all times.

Staff worked with people to create support plans in areas of their lives which could present with risks to themselves or others. Some of the people had not lived in a family home

and so the plans reflected the skills they were acquiring. For example one person’s plan was ‘I do not have safety awareness so I need staff to help me but I still like my independence.’ It then described what had been agreed to help keep the person safe when in the kitchen, when they were carrying out personal care or were outside their home or if their mood changed. Two people who used the service, spoke proudly of their achievements of having attended and passed food hygiene and infection control courses to enable them prepare their food safely.

The care plans also identified the triggers which could initiate behaviours that challenged. These detailed how staff should manage these situations to ensure the safety of the person as well as other people who may be present. Staff described the approaches they used in these situations which reflected the information seen in the risk assessments. Feedback from health and social care professionals spoke of how the service offered a good level of support which made the person feel safe and able to realise their potential as a person after many years of detention under the Mental Health Act.

The service had good recruitment practice. The manager described how staffing levels were built up around each person’s individual needs. Staff were recruited specifically to work with people who were in the process of moving. The manager explained, “It’s important people are compatible, that customers can trust and relate to the staff and that they are fully involved in selecting the staff that work with them”. Each customer drew up a ‘my ideal support worker profile’ before adverts were placed. Six of the people spoken with had interviewed the staff that supported them. One person asked for the interviews to be filmed and they made a DVD of who they were, their experience of care and the questions they asked staff. They said “I interview the people who are going to look after me I tell them how I am and how they must always listen to how I am and not just what I say”.

A relative wrote ‘Next Steps have listened to our wishes and experience with our relative and have recruited the right support workers to help develop our relative’s independence’. Feedback from a care professional stated how ‘where possible Next Steps involve service users and their family in the recruitment of staff and search for suitable accommodation. In services where people share they treat service user compatibility very importantly’.

## Is the service safe?

People were happy with the support they received with their medicines. The majority of people had not had the opportunity to look after their medicines before. People told us they were given training and support to self-medicate. One person explained how they took their medicines and staff would check it for them. "I can now take my medication on my own but I always show staff and they can sign for it". People and staff were clear about how to manage medicines safely.

Each staff member had received medicines training and there was clear guidance and systems in place to store and record medicines. We saw that errors which had occurred were quickly identified and new procedures and training put in place to ensure no repetition. Talking with staff, looking at medication records was evidence that medication was managed safely by trained staff.

# Is the service effective?

## Our findings

Everyone told us how good the staff were and how much they helped them. One person said “Staff are there when I need them they know what I need”. Another person said “They are great we help them too but they know how to do things”. A relative said “I am confident that my relative is being supported by staff who are knowledgeable but also care”. Another relative spoke of how staff were flexible, balanced and sensible in their approach to their relative and were “soft without being motherly”.

Staff we spoke with were happy with their training. All of the staff said they were confident in their work as they had excellent training and support. “We get loads and if we feel we need anything it can be arranged.” One staff member said. All staff completed induction training and spent time shadowing other staff before they commenced work. Next Steps followed the new national care certificate framework for its induction programme for all staff. Training was offered through training courses with accredited companies and was delivered by E-learning, in house training and shadowing. Core training had been provided in subjects such as autism awareness, infection control, fire safety, equality and diversity and first aid. Training was provided to meet the specific needs of the people who used the service, such as training in positive techniques to avoid crisis and to provide strategies for responding to different types of behaviours.

The manager had developed links with various organisations to deliver training tailored to the needs of specific individuals. There were clear training schedules for staff working with people who would be moving from long term care or hospitals to supported living. One staff member said they were booked on a management of behaviour training but the senior staff member had spent time going through what they needed to know so that prior to the training they felt supported and confident in supporting people.

One of the senior staff described the team leader programme the manager had developed. It covered knowledge required to support people who may have behaviours that challenge others, developing leadership and working with partner agencies skills as well as understanding the legal framework related to supported living. Staff were supported to take the lead in key meetings and build up their confidence and skills.

Feedback from six health and social care professionals was very positive about the staff team’s skills and training. They said that staff contacted professionals if they were unsure as to how to support people with any behaviours that they had not seen before. All stated how the person who used the service was at the centre of their care and support and that staff provided this service to a high standard

We observed staff supporting people confidently throughout our visit. They related in a relaxed easy manner. Staff demonstrated that they knew people’s needs well and spoke of how their training informed the way they worked with people.

Staff confirmed that they received supervision and support from senior staff and records confirmed this. They said they had informal day-to-day contact with senior staff and the manager and owner were available at any time if required. There was a formal 24 hour on call rota for staff. One of the staff said “We are a good team, like a family we work together well and support each other.”

People were encouraged and supported to be actively involved in all decisions about their lives. Their care plans were clear about the areas they wished support in and how best to provide it. For example ‘I do not have safety awareness I need staff help but I still like my independence’. People’s capacity to carry out specific task or manage aspects of their lives was assessed. For example one person was in control of their weekly budget and held a bank card. However they knew they may overspend so staff supported them as necessary. If anyone had an advocate or a legal guardian they were fully involved in decision making.

People said staff always asked them if they wanted to be supported and would also give them space if they needed it. On one of the home visits the staff maintained a distance so that the person could show us around their home on their own. “They are always there when I need them”. The person said.

Two of the people being supported by the service had completed a food safety course. They were supported to plan their menu, shop and prepare their food. In one house where four people lived the staff explained how initially they had all their meals together. However, now each person planned and prepared their menu. One staff member said “Our whole focus in our work is about enabling people to make choices to empower people”.

## Is the service effective?

Staff supported people to access healthcare appointments and worked closely with health and social care professionals involved in their care. The feedback from health and social care professionals confirmed this. For example 'The communication from the manager throughout has been positive and effective. There have

always been regular meetings and the staff care to a very high standard". Another professional wrote 'Staff made use of and proactively communicated with other professionals involved in supporting a person'. One person said, "I need to go to get blood tests and see the doctor I don't like going but a staff member helps me."



# Is the service caring?

## Our findings

People were supported by staff who were passionate about their work. They were warm, kind, caring, considerate and respectful. People we spoke with were appreciative and spoke well of the care provided by staff. One person told us "Staff are always there and we plan things together they are good". Another person said "I like the staff they are funny and they help me". Relatives spoke very highly of the staff, how caring and flexible they are. One relative said "What they have done for my relative is amazing".

Staff showed they had good relationships with people, speaking about them warmly showing that they held them in high regard. They also demonstrated a detailed knowledge of people as individuals and knew what their personal likes and dislikes were. Staff showed respect for people by addressing them using their chosen name.

The owner and managers described the efforts they made to secure the right place for each person. This included looking at the type of property; the area; the possible social links and how they continued searching until they, the person, their families and the partner agencies were happy that it was the place to help the person flourish. The managers and staff went the extra mile in creating a service which was tailored made to each person for example taking time to find the right property in an area which would help a person become part of the local community even if it meant taking longer to set everything up. People had developed a sense of self-worth and felt care for and encouraged to try new things. For example, since using the service one person had been supported to develop the confidence to invite people into their home for tea and had began to build up relationships with all their neighbours.

The managers and staff strived to create new ways of working with people to build up their confidence and abilities. One person explained to us how much their life had changed for the better since being supported to move into their own home. They told us they wanted to make a DVD of their life since moving as they have had such a complete life change. They said "I have lived X years in care and now I have my own home and am friends with my neighbours. I can go out to the shops and go and see people. I am happy".

Staff encouraged people to use their experiences of care to help train and develop care staff. For example, one person

spoke of how they interviewed staff and told them that they must not use their phone when they were supporting them except in an emergency. They said staff listened to them and never used their phone. People were routinely involved in interviewing their staff. People undertook training with the staff, for example food hygiene and explained how they help staff to understand the importance of getting things right..

We saw a DVD of people who were supported to go on holiday and had the opportunity to swim with the dolphins. A person who had never had a holiday before went abroad supported by staff and was animated about the adventures they had. Staff spent time with people to enable them to choose and plan their holiday. They went the extra mile in seeking a holiday which would enable people to experience new and exciting activities.

People were regular callers to the agency's office and on the day of our visit we observed the relaxed atmosphere and warm reception everyone received on entering the agency. People felt at home and enjoyed a relaxed conversation with staff. We saw staff respected and encouraged people and mutual respect was evident.

One staff member said "I have never looked back since starting at Next Steps it is a family based atmosphere, very caring and we work as a team with the people we support. Everyone feels at home in the office". Another staff member said "I really like working here I enjoy it and I gain so much".

People's histories, likes dislike and preferences were all gathered in their care plans which they wrote with the staff and important people to them. People were supported to express their views and were fully involved in making decisions about their care and support. We saw, through talking with people and seeing how they related to staff that they were empowered by the way the staff offered support. One health and social care professional said how staff had helped a person to really establish a home in the local community and supported them to get voluntary employment, develop a new social network and have more frequent contact with a close friend and family.

People were encouraged and given opportunities to try new activities to build up their confidence, self-esteem and life experience. The service had supported people to find voluntary jobs and one person was involved with interviewing potential social workers for the local council and was supported by staff to attend interviews.



## Is the service caring?

People were helped to develop a circle of people who were supportive to them and could be actively involved in contributing to their individual support plans. People were supported to participate in a range of social and leisure activities in line with their personal interests. For example a person said how they now enjoyed working in a charity

shop and how at the beginning they only ever worked at the back of the shop but now they were out the front and really enjoying it. They told us, "I helped a friend get a job there too and told them what they could do to get to work in the shop with the customers".

# Is the service responsive?

## Our findings

People had support to live their lives according to their own wishes. One person said “I keep in touch with my friends, I visit them and they visit me. I plan what I want to do and the staff are with me”. A relative said, “My relative is happier than they have ever been, they can see their family when they want, plan whatever they want to do”. Another relative said “My relative now has male carers which is really refreshing and they are delighted”.

Care and support was planned in partnership with people, their families and key care professionals when required. People were involved from the beginning in planning their move including securing a property, interviewing staff which included putting together a profile of ‘my ideal support worker’. They were supported to identify their needs, choices and preferences and how these should be met. These were written in a plan of care which included their personal history and their goals. The manager spoke of the importance of spending time getting everything right and involving people at every stage. Some moves took twelve months to plan and complete to ensure that the person’s needs were accurately met. We saw the effect of this way of working, people had gained in confidence and self-esteem. They were able to build new friendships, undertake new activities and discover life skills though the flexible way staff worked.

One health and social care professional wrote ‘This has been a very successful transition and they have managed to get the balance of support just right. The staff team has been very stable and consistent and the person that moved has always been included in decisions about their care and support’

One situation where four people moved into a house, the owner decided the only fair way to allocate rooms, which were different sizes was by drawing names out of a hat with all the people and their families present. Everyone felt it was a fair and just way to allocate rooms and all parties were happy.

When people first moved into their home staff produced a pictorial staff rota to reassure people and help them get to know the staff members that would be supporting them. They also created pictorial weekly plans as a way of enabling people who had never planned their own time, to visualise the possibilities and how to build up a plan.

People were encouraged to set realistic and achievable goals. For example a person wanted to lose weight but did not know how to start so a slimming club was sought to help them lose weight and gain an understanding of their diet and get to know new people. Staff worked with people to build up their confidence and empower them to take part in activities that would not have been possible during their time in long term care.

Staff worked hard to maximise people’s potential for independence and responsibility. For example one person with complex behaviours who had several placements breakdown had now settled with a level of support which focused on enabling and empowering them. They had been able to build up a network of friends and had the confidence to try new things and learn new skills.

People were encouraged to raise any concerns, worries or problems they had with the staff. Everyone had an accessible complaints policy. People told us they could always talk to someone they felt listened to and knew what to do if they were worried.

We received positive feedback from all the agencies working with Next Steps with everyone commenting how they worked in a very open and person centred way. One professional wrote how staff shadowed other staff in someone’s present placement in order to get to know the person and their complex behaviours. This enabled staff to build up a picture of how people had been supported to have consistency and transition into a new setting more easily.

# Is the service well-led?

## Our findings

People supported by Next Steps called into the office frequently and said that they felt part of the organisation. “It’s good coming here”. One person said, “They listen and I can tell them things too.” We saw another person in one of the supported living properties supporting a staff member to find something and said “We work as a good team”.

Relatives were very positive about the owner and manager of Next Steps. Comments included “I can’t fault them they are always in touch and cannot do enough for my relative”. The feedback from health and social care professionals spoke of excellent joint working and communication between all parties and how people being supported were always at the centre of their work.

The manager said there was a strong leadership structure in place with a team leader and acting team leader in each house. The manager encouraged the team to raise any issues or concerns and promoted honesty and openness. People and their families were actively involved in decisions and understood and shared Next Steps ethos and goals.

There were regular meetings for staff which helped maintain consistency across the service. Satisfaction surveys had been distributed to people who used the service, families and professionals. The overall feedback from each of the groups was positive and the manager and owner used the feedback received to develop and improve Next Steps. For example, the development of team leaders and everyone having access to online training was as a result of the feedback received.

The manager had systems to monitor the quality of the service and promote continuous improvement, which included learning from incidents by reviewing what had happened, learning from them and taking any action required. For example the manager and owner made frequent spot checks on people and the staff but had not recorded them formally. However, they understood the need to do so in order to reflect on their practise and review the quality of each supported housing unit. The manager is in the process of appointing a deputy manager.

Next Steps did not advertise, but received referrals from health and social care professionals. The manager told us that the service had an excellent reputation. Professionals said how they found Next Steps declined referrals if they felt unable to meet the needs and insisted that appropriate transition planning was undertaken for those people who were moving out of a hospital setting.

The manager and provider promoted a positive culture that was person-centred, open, inclusive and empowering. They encouraged all involved to voice their views. There was a shared vision amongst all the people who used the service, staff and relatives based on person centred care, independence and empowerment. Staff policies and procedures, induction and training all emphasised the involvement of the individual in decisions about their care and the manager had developed systems to monitor how well that was working. The owner and manager welcomed the inspection process saying they constantly strived to improve and achieve more for the people they supported.