



**How we taught our staff
and the people we support
to communicate**



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Who is Optima Care?



We provide homes and support to people with Learning Disabilities, Autism and Mental Health conditions.



We support people of all ages, from 18 years old upwards.



Many of our individuals have problems with their hearing, speech or sight.



We help people learn the skills they need to lead a more **independent** life.



You're **independent** when you can do things for yourself and make your own decisions.

Why is communication so important?



Imagine being stuck in a room where no-one can hear you, understand you or help you. In other words, other people have no idea what you want or need.



This can be really frustrating. Over time, it could make you angry, sad and very lonely.



To help people tell us what they want and need, we sometimes use **Makaton**, or cards with pictures on them.



These things weren't really working though. **Makaton** wasn't understood very well by our staff or the people we support. And the picture cards helped people say some things, but not enough.



When someone uses **Makaton**, they use their hands to do a type of sign language and also speak at the same time to help children and adults to communicate.

What's new at Optima Care?



We wanted to send some of our staff on a course to learn more about the **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)**. We heard it was really good but the course was quite expensive.



PECS helps people who can't speak to communicate using pictures.



We heard that **Health Education England** offers to help health and care providers like Optima Care pay for staff training, if it also helped the people we support.



Health Education England helps people get access to great healthcare by ensuring that the staff who support them are caring, understanding and able to make a difference.



We told Health Education England all about why we wanted our staff to learn more about PECS. And they said "Yes!".



We received funding for some of our staff to get the training they needed to be able to use PECS, to communicate better with the people we support.

How did that help with communication?



Our staff learnt how to help some of the people we support to communicate using PECS.



Now they could tell us what they needed and wanted and also how they felt. It made everyone happier and not lonely anymore.



We also taught their families how to use PECS so they could communicate much better with their sons and daughters. This also made them happy.



By using PECS we're helping the people we support to become more independent. We're also helping to bring families and friends together.

What's next?



Our **Training Manager** is going to work with the staff who've learnt PECS to design a programme to teach more of our staff how to use it.



This means we'll be able to help even more of the people we support to communicate.



We're really grateful to Health Education England for giving us the help we needed to support our people to lead more independent lives.