

ABILITY NEWS

Sept 2021

Promoting Independent Living



Contents

Welcome Jeff Skipp	2
COVID-19 – working to keep you safe	3
Customer Stories, compliments and letter	4-5
Making the most of summer	6
Information	7
The end of lockdown?	8-9
Ability complaints procedure	10-11
Managing your home	12
Meet your Housing Officers	13
Supporting you to achieve your goals	14
Ability – our personal services for you	14
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results	15

Welcome by Jeff Skipp

It has without doubt been an unprecedented year, with Covid-19 posing a serious risk to the safety of residents and colleagues. In March, with the virus spreading significantly across the country and throughout our communities, it became clear we were heading for a national lockdown; making it essential that Ability found new ways to operate.

The support of all our residents was fantastic and greatly appreciated, and together we managed to deliver essential services whilst maintaining a Covid-19 safe environment. On the occasions we needed to enter your home during this time, together we were able to agree a safe way to carry out repairs and protect everyone concerned.

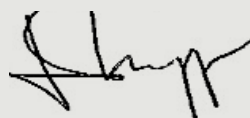
We also put in place wellbeing calls, regularly contacting residents to ensure they were safe and to provide additional supports when needed. Maintaining the safety of our residents, while supporting them and minimising the loneliness and isolation

experienced during these challenging times, has been our focus.

Managing the pandemic and keeping residents, colleagues and contractors safe has been the priority during the year. We have also been able to undertake a number of our planned projects and these are outlined further in this review.

Once again can I thank you for your support during this challenging period. I am sure we all hope that, with a vaccine being rolled out, life may move closer to normal in the coming months.

Yours sincerely



Jeff Skipp, CEO

COVID-19 Working to keep you safe

By Jeff Skipp



The pandemic has been a difficult time for you, our customers, and Ability Housing Association has had to change how we do things to keep our residents, staff and contractors, safe.

When the first lockdown happened in March last year, we quickly reduced our repairs service to focus on emergency and urgent jobs, as well as important checks like health and safety inspections, including servicing gas boilers and cookers. We also carried on with our estate inspections to make sure your homes were all safe.

Helping us change for you

Our residents have been really understanding and supportive of this change. When it was necessary to come into your homes, you have worked with us and our contractors to make sure work could be done in a safe way, that kept you safe.

At the start of the pandemic, we called our residents weekly to make sure you all had the support you needed. We carried on doing this

for the rest of the year for anyone who wanted this regular contact.

Some of you have told us you felt reassured seeing their Housing and Support Officer doing estate inspections and to know they were checking on things. Unfortunately, we could not invite you to accompany the inspections as we normally would do.

We also did our fire risk assessments early to make sure all necessary fire safety precautions were in place at a time when many people were spending more time at home than usual.

Protecting Care & Support services

We worked hard to stop Covid-19 from taking hold in our Care & Support services. This meant introducing difficult and challenging rules, which included stopping visitors, closing communal areas and introducing strict social distancing and infection control measures.

We know that these procedures have been a challenge for residents and have had a large impact on so many of the people we serve.

Ability's staff have tried to reduce these effects on our residents. They have worked with you to arrange activities such as walking, board games, cooking in small groups and others – while following the government's safety guidance. They also helped residents in supported housing services form "bubbles", so people could feel less isolated during this time.

We have always been proud of the difference our staff make to our customers. During the pandemic, their dedication to providing you with services has been fantastic.

Thank you from Ability for helping us to support you during this time. Ability and our staff will continue to work hard to provide you with the best possible service during the coming months and after the pandemic.

Customer stories, compliments and letters



Housing and Support – an Ability case study

One of our residents – a woman with several health issues – had been living in temporary accommodation for two years. She hadn't had the support she needed to move to a different home.

Ability's Housing & Support Officer, Sarah Yeo, helped her move into an adapted flat. Sarah helped set up her housing benefit and utilities, as well as ordering payment cards enabling her to pay cash everywhere – because she doesn't trust direct debits.

Sarah ensured she let the DWP know about her change of address. When she let us know she was struggling in the new flat's wet room and had fallen over a couple of times, Ability helped her contact social services, who provided a shower seat and walker to use in the room.

We speak to the tenant every two weeks – and will often pop in to see her and help her read any letters that she has received.

Improving my diet – and cooking!

By Mary, Sir Robert Mews

"Having made a choice to improve my wellbeing by positively managing my weight,

staff supported me to consult with a dietician, who advised me about the changes that I would need to make to achieve my goal.

"Before, I used to eat mostly microwaved food. So, I started shopping and cooking healthy meals for myself.

"But I was not a good cook! I had to start from scratch. With support from staff, I have learnt to prepare meals and I am amazed at how much I am enjoying the experience. I couldn't have made a better decision - I really enjoy cooking more and eating more healthily."

Making my wishes a reality

By Ramesh, Hayes Park Lodge

"I often have severe respiratory problems and have been admitted to hospital due to reoccurring chest infections. Thankfully, I was given one of the best key workers at Hayes Park Lodge – Sahra, who has really listened to my health concerns.

Sahra said to me: 'Ramesh, we will get through this together and I will be supportive every step of the way'. My key worker didn't give up on me.

"With Sahra's help, I was signed up to a pulmonary rehabilitation team. I completed my course and I feel much better within myself. I don't have to worry too much about

my health, my breathing has improved, and I can continue with my exercises during the day.

"So, cheers to a new, improved and healthy Ramesh!"

Foster ready for next move

Foster is moving onto a local council property in Merton. He says "I have not become unwell for years now. My life has been a battle of ups and downs, but I now feel ready. I feel confident enough to live on my own now."

Now with a portfolio of training and volunteering, a new flat, and new prospects, he hopes to be successful and healthy and bring his fiancé over from Ghana to live with him and share a long and happy life.

My first paid job

Ricardo (also known as 'R') from Merton Floating Support, said, "I really like my flat and I have found the support really helpful. I like to keep busy by attending various recovery college courses, and I participate in the groups that my keyworker helped me to find.

"With the support of my employment advisor and keyworker, I got my first paid job working for Royal Mail. I am happy that I took the plunge and went for it. This is a big step, but with the continued support I know I will be fine".

Customer compliments

Here is some of the feedback we have had about Ability's services.

I have been using Ability services for six years, from my previous residence until my residence at Hayes Park Lodge and Ability Housing Support. Ever since their help and support, I have gradually recovered a little bit better every day, and recovered from a dark, disorganised place in my life.

I have remarkably recovered because of the excellent of care and professionalism of the staff at Ability, their care, support, motivation and organisation has dramatically improved my health, lifestyle, hygiene, self care, residential maintenance, social communication and the overall general quality of living and quality of rehabilitation.

I have written a book about rehabilitation, examining mental health, associated with disease, narcotic related disease and abusive relationships, and abuse in communities. Where abuse can cause misdiagnosis and false realities of truth about mental health patients, drug users and mental health discrimination. The help from the staff has enabled me to make more sense of my rehabilitation research.

I have also just begun the first stages of arts and crafts manufacturing in a small business start up. It has taken me 18 months to train and budget for equipment on a limited income. It is safe, hygienic, environmentally friendly and a home business.

Through a lot of hard work and dedication, I am soon able to become self-sufficient and stop dependence on the state benefit system.

From the mess I was in three years ago, when first moving to Hayes Park Lodge, and under some very difficult situations and pressures, I have still moved forward and gradually recovered. The care team have worked miracles, and I am privileged and honoured to have met some wonderful people.

Thank you kindly, Ability. *From Patrick*

Hamlet Lodge

Elise, the sister of resident QK, thanked us for setting up his new phone. She said communication with him much better now and that the staff at Hamlet Lodge were marvellous.



Hayes Park Lodge

RF's mother said she was pleased that he now has a freedom pass, so he can go for his monthly depots independently. She said the atmosphere in the staff office is pleasant and welcoming – and added that she thinks that the staff are great, respectful, and doing a good job.

She was especially proud to hear that RF is also moving to the next level with medication management to start self-medicating – and that he will be supported with a mobile phone.

Sessile Court

Previous resident Miriam sent a thank you card to staff, for their support and helping her move to more independent living.



All of our residents were contacted during each lockdown to ask whether they required any additional support, and frequency of contact agreed on a weekly or fortnightly basis if requested.

100%

of homes gained a gas safety certificate against a target of 100%



Properties in the year across Care & Support, Supported Housing, and general need.



HSOs inspected **100%** of our estates on a minimum six-weekly cycle.



99.3% of our properties gained an electrical certificate on a 5-year cycle



We received **18** reports of anti-social behaviour.



98.4% compliance achieved across all areas.



12 complaints regarding estate management



32 complaints regarding repairs



We completed **2,744** repairs

Making the most of summer

By Mary Sir Robert Maw



Making the most of summer

You might not have realised it, but the days have got longer and the temperatures higher, too. We can help you make the most of it! Here are some tips you can start doing to get yourself and your home ready for the summer so you can enjoy the season to its fullest:

Turn off your heating

Once it starts getting warmer you can switch off your gas central heating this will help you save on your gas bills.

Clean out your closet

Once the warmer weather starts, it's time to think about putting away your winter clothes and get out the t-shirts, shorts. Put your bulky sweaters and coats into airtight bags or bins and store them away until winter strikes again. This is also a great time to assess what you really wear and what you don't.

Eat healthily and drink plenty of water

Stay hydrated and feel energised by drinking the recommended amount of water (typically eight glasses a day). If you are planning a day out to the local park or even the beach or countryside, make sure you have everything you need, including a healthy picnic, sun creams, sun hats and drink plenty of non-alcoholic drinks.

Switch to lighter bedding

Similar to your clothing, summer is also the time to switch to lighter bedding. Replace thick duvets and wool blankets for lighter bedding. Keep a light throw nearby in case the nights still get chilly!

Clean the windows and open them up

This is a great time to have your windows cleaned inside and out. Also open your windows and air out your home. There's nothing better for you than breathing in the fresh air and having it in your home.

Clean off patio furniture

Garden furniture is another one of those things that gets hit hard over the winter. Wipe it down with some cleaners made for outdoor furniture, you'll soon be ready to bring out your chair cushions to really finish it off.

If you are lucky enough to have a garden or patio area, plant some seeds or store-bought flowers in pots or in flowerbeds for an instant makeover.

The end of lockdown?

11 tips on how to cope

After many months of lockdown rules, we are seeing the end of many restrictions. But, while some people are looking forward to getting back to their 'ordinary' lives, others are feeling worried about the change.

It is quite normal to feel like this. A recent survey of 900 people by Anxiety UK found that 37% of people couldn't wait for the end of lockdown, a similar number of people (36%) said they were 'quite happy to stay at home'. The other 27% said they didn't have strong feelings either way.

Of those who felt anxious, 46% said socialising again was their biggest worry; 30% said it was visiting a busy shopping centre; and 23% said it was using buses and trains.

1 Go slow...

Go at your own pace – and it is fine to say 'no' to things. Do what social activities you are comfortable with and build up slowly.

2 ...but do something

It is easy to avoid doing things, but this can make life seem more difficult in the long run. Set yourself targets – like meeting one person for a coffee or a snack outside – and build up from there.

3 Read well

There is a lot of different and confusing information about COVID-19. Make sure you get yours from good sources – like gov.uk or the NHS website. Limit the amount of news you read or watch, too. One or two times a day is enough.

4 Talk it through

Before socialising with others, discuss it with them. That way everybody knows how everyone else is feeling.

5 And relax...

It can be exciting to see people socially again, but it can sometimes be stressful. Make sure you make regular time to relax, too.

6 Sort your thoughts

Some worries can help us, but others can be unhelpful. Try and separate the two kinds – it may help you to see things differently.

7 Speak your mind

Telling someone you trust how you feel can be very helpful. This could be a friend, family member, doctor, or someone on a helpline. You can also do this online.

8 Planning pays

Making a good plan for a social occasion can make you feel less worried about it. The plan can include information like the start and finish time of an event, and how many people are likely to be there.

9 Find a routine

Our lives have been different over the last year or so. But try to keep some routine, such as waking up, going to bed, going for a walk and eating lunch at the same time every day.

10 Write it down

Writing about how you feel in a book can be useful and can help you notice the progress you are making. When you look back at your writing in the future, you will see how far you have come.

11 Be Present

Try and focus on the present, not what 'should have happened' or what 'might happen'. Relaxation, mindfulness and enjoying nature can all help you do this.

These tips were adapted from NHS 'Every Mind Matters' advice. For more information and helpful videos, visit: www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/tips-to-cope-with-anxiety-lockdown-lifting/

Improving your homes

Ability invests significant amounts in making sure that the homes that it provides are kept up to a very high standard.

So far this year we have invested more than £100,000 in replacing ten central heating boilers, ten complete kitchens, two complete heating systems and three sets of replacement windows.

We have also spent another £50,000 on extensive internal redecorations at Strauss Court, Layton Court and Fiddlers Green, our Care home in South London.

We have further investments planned for the second half of the year, and a planned investment programme that extends into the future.



REPAIRS

At Ability we are committed to ensuring you live in a home that is safe, secure, and well maintained.

If you have any concerns regarding the condition of your home, please contact Julie Gray at Ability on 01784 495635.



ABILITY'S REPAIRS SERVICE OFFERS 4-HOUR/24-HOUR/5-DAY OR 28-DAY RESPONSE TIMES.

Our call centre is operated by Just Housing Group. They have a dedicated line for Ability customers: call **0808 164 7474** to report repairs.

The team who answer the phone will listen to you

and allocate a priority to the repair accordingly.

Housing and Support Officers are also available to assist customers with any concerns about repairs or assistance in managing their repair.

Ability's complaints procedure



Have you got a problem, are you unhappy with our service?

At Ability we try to offer you the best service we can.

But sometimes things go wrong.

If you are not happy with something about your service, you can tell us about it. This is called making a complaint.

It is important to complain so that we can put things right and improve the way we work.

How to tell us if you have a problem

There are lots of ways you can tell us if you have a complaint.

Where possible we encourage you to talk to your local staff who know you and will try to put things right.

talk to your Support Worker or member of staff in your local office
talk to your Housing Services Office.

Or you can:

send an email to:
complaints@ability-housing.co.uk

or write a letter to:

Complaints
Ability Housing Association
The Coach House
Gresham Road
Staines
TW18 2AE You can also fill out our complaints form on the Ability website:

www.ability-housing.co.uk

or call: 01784490910

If it is difficult for you to tell us about the problem yourself, you can ask someone else to do it for you.

This could be:

- your friend
- a relative
- your local councillor
- Citizens Advice Bureau.

When we get your complaint, we will try to put things right as quickly as possible.

Your complaint may need investigating. If so we will write to you, call you or visit you within 2 working days of receiving the complaint.

We will try to sort out your problem within 10 working days. If we need more time, we will contact you.

For more information on Ability's complaints procedure, visit:
<http://www.ability-housing.co.uk/about-us/complaints-procedure/>

Do you have a complaint?





Managing your home

by Lucy Sivasundram

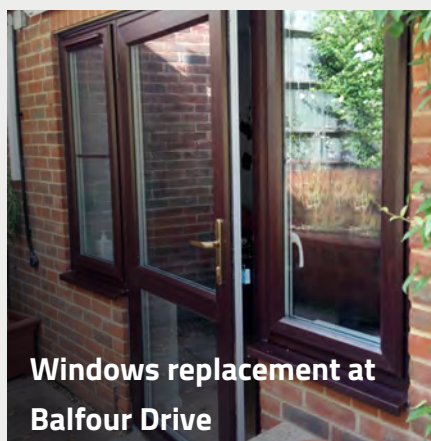
Our Intensive Housing Management Service aims to support you in running your homes. This includes helping you settle in at the beginning of the tenancy; support with completing housing benefit claims and updating these when needed; and advice on paying bills and other debts related to your home.

We can also support you with any issues about repairs and rent – and help all our residents understand your rights and responsibilities from your tenancy agreement. This includes advice on keeping your home safe and secure and finding support from other agencies if you need it.

Tackling nuisance issues

Ability helps by dealing with nuisance issues such as antisocial behaviour or other concerns you may have about your home or environment. We can even help residents move on to alternative accommodation when it is appropriate. Our aim is to help you live as independently as possible.

Replacement doors and windows
Ability regularly modernises its flats and houses, and we recently replaced all the doors and windows at our Balfour Drive service.



**Windows replacement at
Balfour Drive**

We are pleased to confirm our programme for replacing all windows and doors at Balfour Drive is complete. There are 10 bungalows and six houses. These works took three weeks to complete from 3-23 September 2020 .

The programme was managed by MEA and the contractors Exbury Homes were very professional and friendly throughout the project and worked around our residents' needs and appointments. Residents were very complimentary during the works. One wrote in, saying:

“We are delighted with the new windows and doors, the company fitting them were excellent and they arranged things so that I only had to take one day off work. All of the fitters were very professional and they did an excellent job.”

Meet your Housing Officers

Introducing two more of Ability's hard-working Housing Officers.



By Katherine Burden

How long have you worked at Ability?

15 months.

2. Which regional areas do you cover?

Oxfordshire, Swindon, Hayes, Essex, St Albans.

3. What is the best part about being a Housing and Support Officer?

Helping people gain independent living.

4. What types of issues do you support our tenants with?

ASB, applying for benefits, adaptations to their homes and other things.

5. During the pandemic, what has been the most challenging part of your job?

Not being able to see people face to face.

6. If you had more time, is there anything you would like to do more of in your job?

Visiting every tenant individually.

7. Do you have any hobbies or interests you can share with us?

I enjoy the gym and have recently started weight training. I also enjoy socialising with friends and family, going for dinner and drinks.

8. What else would you like to tell your tenants?

Stay positive, hopefully things will be back to normal soon.

1. How long have you worked at Ability?

Over 10 years

2. Which regional areas do you cover?

Surrey, Hampshire, Slough, Berkshire and Reading. At the moment, parts of Dorset, too.

3. What is the best part about being a Housing & Support Officer?

Been able to support tenants who are having difficulties with tenancies, arrears and all aspects of living in social housing. Supporting with budgets and sometimes just being the person that tenants call to chat to and ask for advice.

4. What types of issues do you support our tenants with?

Rent issues, repairs, signposting tenants to Citizens Advice Bureau, providing information on budgeting, finding better energy tariffs.

5. During the pandemic, what has been the most challenging part of your job?

Not being able to visit tenants face to face. Some of our tenants enjoy a chat and a coffee with the HSOs. Other tenants need face to face contact due to their disabilities, such as impaired hearing and sight. It is nice to be interactive with tenants as not all of them have access to digital technology. We were able to use Zoom, WhatsApp and other video platforms.

6. If you had more time, is there anything you would like to do more of in your job?

More inclusion with tenants, social events would be good to include all tenants and promote our housing association.

7. Do you have any hobbies or interests you can share with us?

I do aromatherapy and crystal meditation, and I am a paranormal investigator.

8. What else would you like to tell your tenants?

That they are valued and will always be listened too. We endeavour to find positive answers, outcomes to their questions and issues they raise.



by Helen Miller Smith

Supporting you to achieve your goals

(Care & Support)



By Yewande Keleko, Area Manager - London

One of our residents – a lady with significant health conditions – had been living in unsuitable temporary accommodation for two years and didn't have the support she needed to organise a move.

Ability Housing Association supports people with lots of different needs, including learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health issues. We give a range of support, from mental health services to community support in people's own homes.

We want to support you in a way that is personal to you and want to help you live as independently as possible, as a part of your local community.

Training our staff

We recently won the contract to carry on providing our services to 150 customers in four schemes in Hillingdon.

Since then, we have been focussing on making staff more effective in the support they give, training them to help you achieve your goals more easily and develop the skills you need to live more independently.

An important part of this is encouraging all our customers to take positive risks. This means talking to you, exploring what you really want to achieve, and reinforcing and developing your strengths. One example of this is helping a

customer to manage their own medication, so they can live even more independently.

This has helped more of our customers feel ready to move on and take their next step, with more people using our supported living services.

Staff have been able to recognise customers' strengths and achievements. By focusing on what you want to achieve, staff can help you celebrate what you have done so far, which can give them the motivation to go even further.



Our personal services for you

(Care & Support)



by Keith Irwin-Hill

Ability wants to make our services as personal to your needs and to give you control over your own life as much as possible.

Ability is working hard to do this for everyone we support – and to ensure all our staff understand how important this is.

Our support planning helps us work closely with you to make sure we understand your choices and how you need us to support you. This also means we can show the people who pay for the services what we are doing for them.

Rewarding risks

We all have risks in our everyday lives – this is usually a good thing! Taking a risk like a walk to the shops is something we should do so we can live a more interesting life. We call this 'positive risk taking'.

We believe our customers need to take positive risks to help them become more independent and to achieve their goals. We want to work with you to help you take

positive risks and to reduce any hazards and support you in the safest way.

Supporting you

Some Ability customers only need a few hours' support a week, some need it throughout the day, and others have changing needs. Sometimes we work with other organisations to ensure we are providing the right support.

If we need to change the support we give you, we make sure we give our staff the right training to provide it.

Did you know?

BT is offering half-price broadband (£15 a month) for people on benefits. For more details, visit: www.bt.com/exp/broadband/home-essentials

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

We carried out a customer satisfaction survey last year, during which we sent surveys to 749 housing residents, of which 250 replied.

We also ran a customer satisfaction survey with our Care & Support customers, sending out 377 surveys, of which 112 replied.

Our residents informed Ability that our housing services need to improve in several areas.

We are satisfied with the outcome of the Care and Support customer survey results and very pleased that 92% of customers are happy with the support they receive. However, we will be looking at the results and areas where we can improve.

We are aware that several people who reported feeling less safe mainly receive a community-based service and do not live in our supported living flats. It is important we understand what else we can do to improve how safe and secure people feel, particularly in their communities.

We also want to increase the number of residents who feel they are respected by staff, while looking at increasing management and staff training.

We are now working with our contractors to improve their performance and make sure our customers receive a better service from Ability on their repairs. We have also introduced a role in our property team to focus solely on working with our contractors and dealing with any customer issues quickly.

We want to improve how we listen to customers so are introducing a Customer Panel who will be involved in shaping services, and scrutinising our performance so we can make sure we are working in partnership with our customers.

All our Housing customers will be visited over the coming months to check on the condition of their property, and see whether we can provide any support as part of our Intensive Housing Management Service.

73.3% ARE SATISFIED WITH THE OVERALL SERVICE THEY RECEIVE FROM ABILITY

70.4% ARE SATISFIED THEIR RENT PROVIDES VALUE FOR MONEY

75.5% ARE SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF THEIR HOME

61.4% ARE SATISFIED THEIR SERVICE CHARGE PROVIDES VALUE FOR MONEY

55.3% ARE SATISFIED WITH THE REPAIRS SERVICE THEY RECEIVED

56.1% ARE SATISFIED WE LISTEN TO THEIR CONCERNS

79.4% ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD





COMMITMENTS

VALUES

We engage actively for feedback

We listen actively to our customers, colleagues and partners to help improve what we do and how we do it.

We value differences

We respect and value the individuality of each person.

We focus on ability not disability

We focus on what each person CAN-DO.

We demonstrate integrity

Our culture is one of openness, honesty and personal accountability.

BEHAVIOURS

Seek first to understand

I will listen actively to ensure I have the best possible understanding.

Think: CAN-DO

I will focus on what is possible and think about what I CAN-DO.

Give a positive response

I will work with you to agree a positive outcome, without excuse or blame.

Personal ownership

I will take full responsibility for making sure the agreed outcomes are achieved in good time.

Board Members

- Sally Reay
- Jim MacIntyre (to December 31, 2020)
- Gina Small
- Maureen Osborne
- Nicola Philp
- Dominic Wallace
- Jai Dosanjh

Executive Directors

- Jeff Skipp, CEO
- Peter Gardiner, Director of Resources & Deputy CEO
- Rita Asamoah, Director of Care & Support (to December 2019)
- Lucy Sivasundram, Director of Operations (Housing)
- Jackie Davis, Director of Assets & Housing (to August 2019)

Auditors, solicitors & bankers

- Auditors: Beever and Struthers
- Solicitors: Devonshires
- Bankers: Barclays Bank PLC

Registrations

- Company number: 01261380
- Charity number: 271547
- Registered with The Regulator for Social Housing for England & Wales, Number LH2174

Report production team

- Nav Matharu/Alex Hughes, Ability
- Copy Editor: Dominic Weaver, Twelve
- Design: www.velocity-marketing.co.uk

Company registered office

Ability Housing Association,
The Coach House,
Gresham Road, Staines,
Middlesex, TW18 2AE

How to get in touch with us:

- ☎ : (01784) 490910
- ✉ : info@ability-housing.co.uk
- 📘 : AbilityHA

- 🗣 : AbilityHA
- 📷 : Ability_pictures
- 🌐 : ability-housing-association