

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Coventry City Council

Introduction

Innovative ‘Try Before You Buy’ scheme informing person centred planning.

Overview

Disabled young people in transition who lack life experience outside school and the family home often struggle to understand the choices open to them as they approach adulthood. A new scheme in Coventry is providing opportunities for them to develop skills and understanding which means they are more able to engage in the process of person centred planning. The scheme, Try Before You Buy, has given young people the opportunity to test out a range of new experiences including spending up to a fortnight living in a flat. Staff support them in this and can assess them in a real life situation. Some young people have moved on to successfully live in supported tenancies as a result of the scheme.

Main transferable learning points

- Disabled young people’s horizons are widened if they are given the opportunity to try out different experiences
- Adult skills of planning, directing and decision making need practise: they do not come automatically with age
- Experiential evidence helps young people, families and professionals make better decisions
- Positive risk management is not about risk elimination but may be a hard concept to ‘sell’ to all those involved
- Testing out different living options enables professionals to better assess a

young person’s capabilities and where they may need more support.

Introduction

Children's and Adult Services in Coventry have developed a shared vision for young disabled people to experience more opportunities to live a fuller life. The Children's Disability Team works in conjunction with Community Services for young people in transition to adulthood, including those who may need support from adult services. A Transitions Co-ordinator, jointly funded and accountable to Adult and Children's Services, reports regularly to the Transitions Sub-Group of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board.

Coventry works with the National Transition Support Team to pilot Individual Budgets for young people at transition and is developing:

- Try Before You Buy opportunities for young people to gain an experience of living independently
- Person centred planning to help young people achieve the highest level of independence

In this case study we show how disabled young people in transition without wider life experience are better able to make choices and become genuine partners in person centred planning after taking up opportunities through the Try Before You Buy scheme. Some have moved on to successfully live in supported tenancies as a result of the scheme.

Background

Transition staff found that person centred planning could be a challenge when disabled young people's life experiences were so limited that they had little on which to base their choices and aspirations. Making choices about the future was characterised by anxiety or a lack of understanding for many of the young people, most of whom in this case study have learning difficulties.

Without the adult skills to plan, direct and make choices, it was difficult for disabled young people to make the personalisation agenda work for them. Becoming an adult did not mean that they would automatically have the requisite skill set.

Coventry Council's Transition Co-ordinator Debbie Brake felt disabled young people needed opportunities to test out different activities and experiences and develop new skills to bring some genuine understanding to the process. With the help of funding from the National Transition Support Programme, a scheme called Try Before You Buy was introduced to enable the young people to try out a wide range of experiences ranging from shopping trips and short holidays to spending two weeks living with support in a flat to try out living independently from their families.

Aims and objectives

- Young people better able to engage with person centred planning because they have the skills and experience needed
- Professionals better able to make more accurate assessments based on experiential evidence
- Young people learn to be less dependent on their families and develop skills to cope with limited risk
- Young people become less dependent on formalised support and more able to access opportunities in the community.

Approach

NTSP funding has allowed a freer approach to involving disabled young people in planning their futures. Staff have been encouraged to support creative ways of getting young people to widen their experiences with the aim of gathering evidence to inform future planning.

The programme has delivered on a range of different experiences to at least 13 young people, some of them spending up to a fortnight in a flat with support to try out living away from home. The support generally starts off with a team of five people providing 24 hour support. This gradually reduces to provide the young people with an understanding of what it is like to spend time on their own. The time alone may be as little as 10 to 15 minutes but, where young people develop enough confidence, they may spend a night alone with someone coming in the following morning. This helps more accurate assessments to be made as it is possible to observe young people directly in different situations. It provides a real sense of what they are able to do and what is important to them. It also helps the young person and their families get a better idea of what is acceptable in terms of risk and begins to give the young people an ordinary life experience.

The scheme takes the approach of positive risk taking, enabling young people to test themselves out so that they learn to manage risk within the parameters of a relatively safe environment.

A number of young people have moved on into their own tenancies as a result of the scheme with better tailored and realistic support based on more accurate assessments of need. The aim is that support may be pulled back as young people develop skills and become less dependent on formalised support and more able to access universal opportunities in the community.

The scheme has also enabled young people to try out other accommodation experiences. For one young person with learning difficulties and very disruptive behaviour, the move out of foster care was proving difficult. He was fearful about the future and unable to actively engage in any planning or decision making. A trial period in a residential placement enabled him to try out a new setting which worked out well. The next stage is for him to move on into his own supported tenancy, something that seemed impossible at the outset of his transition into adult services. He is now able to see himself as a young man who can be engaged in decision making and the experience has created a sense of self and positive identity.

Try Before You Buy also offers opportunities to try out new activities. As well as enjoying a good experience, the aim is to get the young people to think of ideas, develop skills in planning and organising, and then to reflect on what they have learned: a learning experience which can go on to inform decision making and improve their life skills. Two young men who went to Blackpool together decided on where to go, where to stay, and how to get there. Organising, planning and budgeting skills were all needed. Another two young men learned problem solving skills when they went away for a camping break and had to learn how to put up their tent.

The key is that the experience is used as a learning opportunity. In one case where a young man expected to move into a tenancy after trying out a fortnight in the flat, the tenancy fell through, upsetting and angering the family who felt he had been let down. However, he got over the disappointment and is now in his own supported tenancy, having learnt that life does not always run smoothly.

Challenges

Families can be anxious about the risk to disabled young people from trying out new activities or living in the flat. The scheme is not about total risk elimination, but positive risk taking, something not always easily accepted by families – or professionals. The view is that disabled young people need to know about risk even more than young people without complex needs. The aim is that even where things go wrong, there should be a learning opportunity as long as the consequences are not too severe.

The approach is also about providing a more normal parenting experience, avoiding building up problems for families as they become too old to provide care in the future. In many cases, allowing young people to very gradually try out managing on their own is helping parents to gain confidence. For example, one young man who was given only ten minutes alone in the flat to start with has now moved out of home and is living in his own supported tenancy.

Even so, keeping the momentum going with families so that they prepare their adolescent sons and daughters for living outside the family

home can be a challenge in situations where the young people are waiting for their own tenancy but are still living at home.

Successes

As a consequence of spending time in the supported flat, one young person has made a choice to live independently in Coventry and attend a local college instead of moving to a residential college which had seemed the only option before.

In other cases where parents felt young people were not able to manage simple activities, the young people have invited their families around to the flat for tea which they have made. As well as promoting independence, this means the young person starts to be seen as an individual within the family who has choices and this can be an eye opener for some families.

Conclusion

Already there has been a huge shift in thinking in Coventry where supported tenancies, considered with some scepticism five years ago, have now become a standard expectation. The hope is that the Try Before You Buy scheme will have proved itself as a successful preventative approach working alongside the new personalisation agenda and deserving to be continued when the NTSP funding ends.

How to make Try Before You Buy good practice

Key issues and principles

- For young people to make informed choices they need to experience wider opportunities and develop skills associated with becoming adults.
- Person centred planning is more meaningful if young people are contributing from a position of having the knowledge and understanding of the issues involved with different pathways.
- Testing out different opportunities, and being allowed to make mistakes, is part of the learning process for disabled young people as much as those without impairment.

Barriers

- Families and professionals being over protective and wanting to eliminate all risk
- Young people being fearful of trying out new things
- Time and money constraints closing down opportunities for young people to try out different experiences.

How to turn it into good practice

Practical ideas

Coventry provides a very clear remit to the provider of support services. They use a provider which offers rehab services rather than traditional home care, so the emphasis is on developing independent living skills rather than doing things for the young people. Gradually leaving space for young people to try out being alone and doing things for themselves needs to be part of a positive risk management approach.

Top tips

- Establish a very clear project plan so you can agree expectations with staff so activities, while fun, provide a learning opportunity for the young people.
- Encourage staff, young people and families to be as creative as possible – this can stimulate surprising ideas.

Key legislation and policy

NHS and Community Care Act 1990	requires local authorities to make a decision as to the services required under Section 4 of the Disabled Persons (Services and Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.
The Children Act 1989	Local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation for children 'in need' who reach the age of 16 and whose welfare remains a concern.
Aiming High for Disabled Children	<p>Launched in May 2007, this transformation programme for disabled children's services aims to actively involve children, young people and their families in the planning and delivery of services in their local area. Participation is a key element of the Disabled Children's Core Offer made under the AH programme. This sets out a national statement of expectations for how disabled children and their families will be informed and involved in assessments and services. The Core offer covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information• Transparency• Assessment• Participation• Feedback

Key Policy

- The white paper **Valuing People** (2001) set out the Government's vision for people with a learning disability, across a range of services based on four key principles of rights, independence, choice, and inclusion. The white paper's vision covered a range of issues including health, housing and employment.
- **Valuing People Now**
Valuing People Now is a three year strategy launched in January 2009. It aims to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities, and the lives of their families and carers. Housing is one of the six areas it is working on. The Government wants more people with learning disabilities and their carers to have a greater choice and control over where and how they live.
- **Department of Health (2006).**
Transition: getting it right for young people. Improving the transition of young people with long term conditions from children's to adult health services
- **Transition: Young Adults with Complex Needs.**
A social exclusion unit final report, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005.
- **Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2007**, Growing Up Matters: Better transition planning for young people with complex needs
- **Supporting People**
www.spkweb.org.uk
The Supporting People programme requires local authorities to plan and buy housing support. It was set up to improve support to vulnerable people, including people with learning disabilities, who wish to live as independently as possible. The programme provides funding to support people in tenancies.
- **National Strategies**
<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/inclusion>
- **Teachernet**
www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atozs/statementsofsen/
- **The National Transition Support Programme** (TSP) is a national programme to improve support for disabled young people in their transition to adulthood. It is part of a wider programme called Aiming High for Disabled Children, to improve local services in England for all disabled children, young people and their families. TSP is running over three years with £19m of funding committed between 2008 and 2011.
www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk
- **Department of Health Personalisation**
www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Personalisation/index.htm
- **Supporting People website**
A grant programme administered through 152 top-tier authorities in partnership with Housing, Health, Social Services and Probation.
www.communities.gov.uk/housing/supportandadaptations/supportingpeople/
- **Valuing People websites**
Focusing on housing issues:
www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/dynamic/valuinpeople148.jsp
Focusing on person centred planning:
<http://valuingpeople.gov.uk/dynamic/valuinpeople136.jsp>
- **Housing Options** are a housing advisory service for people with learning disabilities. Their website includes guides and frequently asked questions explaining many aspects of the choices available to people, including capacity in relation to contracts, different kinds of home ownership etc.
www.housingoptions.org.uk/

Organisations and websites

- **Aiming High for Disabled Children**
www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/health

- **The Independent Living Fund** (www.ilf.org.uk/) is designed to help disabled people to live independently in the community rather than in residential care. They can use payments from the fund to employ people to provide personal and domestic care in their home.

Useful resources

- **Transition guide CDC, 2007.**
A transition guide for all services: key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people
- **The Disability Equality Duty and Housing Factsheet.**
www.officefordisability.gov.uk/
- **Disability Toolkit** produced by the Children's Society, this website includes useful resources and case studies about involving disabled children and young people in participation and decision-making activities.

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National Transition Support Team (NTST)

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NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB. www.ncb.org.uk/cdc

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