

# national transition support team

working together to improve transition  
for disabled young people

## Case Study: Using a DVD to record and communicate the views and experiences of disabled young people

### Introduction

This case study describes a project which utilised DVD technology to record the views and experiences of disabled young people.

### Overview

Young people's input was wanted at a multi-agency conference convened to discuss a report into employment of disabled young people in Gateshead. Rather than create an artificial forum by putting a group of young people on the platform, it was decided to create a DVD to allow them to express their views in more relaxed settings such as school and a disco. Although time and practical constraints meant that it was generally more verbal young people who were able to express their thoughts and experiences, the DVD was able to cover many of the issues faced by all disabled young people in transition, including going to college, attracting funding, finding jobs and future housing needs. Young people's comments and the follow up questions they had for the conference delegates made the DVD a powerful tool which was also used at strategic meetings and on Gateshead Council's website.

### Main transferable learning points:

- Carefully produced DVDs can bring their views to a wide range of people because they can be easily used in different settings, including websites.
- Preparation is important. Young people need to know what to expect during filming, both from the point of view of the equipment that will be used and what they will be asked about.
- A DVD of young people's views and feelings impacts on the audience in

different ways. Parents and carers may find it upsetting; policymakers and providers may find it challenging. A DVD of this type is a powerful tool with the potential to influence change.

### Introduction

Gateshead's Aiming High programme has been running since 2008 and provides services and support for children, their families and carers in three ways: short breaks, individual budgets (Gateshead is a pilot authority) and transition support.

In the first year of Aiming High's Transition Support programme, Gateshead received an extra grant to develop best practice and used it to improve community support for young people aged 14 to 25 years old.

Involving young people and their families has been key to the way Gateshead has approached its Aiming High work. For example The Gateshead Network of Children with Disabilities is a two-way information service for families with disabled children. Parents and carers are encouraged to take part in consultations, share their views with local councillors, take part in empowerment training or join a parents' group. Disabled young people take part in a shadow transition group and are able to have a say on the topics that the authority's transition steering group are considering.

## Background

In April 2010 a report on Employment and Training for Young People with Disabilities was published. The work was commissioned by Gateshead's multi-agency transitions steering group as part of the Aiming High for Disabled Children Transition Support Programme.

The aim of the work was to examine the development of education, training and employment pathways for disabled young people aged between 14 and 25 during the transition process, and focusing on the pathways of three particular disabled young people and the services they engaged with.

Service providers were asked to identify primary barriers for the young people in question and more generally for all disabled young people aiming to take up employment. They were also asked to identify how those barriers could be overcome.

Following the report it was decided that a multi-agency conference should focus on how the authority could progress work on removing barriers to further education, employment and training for disabled young people.

It was felt that more disabled young people than those involved in the study needed a voice at the conference but inviting them onto the platform to face 130 delegates might not be the best way to achieve that. Instead a professional company with experience of working with disabled people was commissioned to film a number of disabled young people in school and at a disco, where the atmosphere was more relaxed for the young people, enabling them to speak more confidently.

## Aims and objectives

- To ensure that disabled young people have a voice alongside those of professionals and parents.
- To ensure that disabled young people have an input into policy and practice development.

## Approach

## Participation

With a track record of participation in

Gateshead, young people had already been involved in group work to get them thinking about the future, using different ways to help them express their hopes and dreams including making collages. The Aiming High for Disabled Children team includes a full time Involvement Worker with experience of gathering children's views on local services. The preparation she was able to undertake with the young people was vital in giving them confidence to express their views during filming. Even so, some of them were very nervous and it helped that the Involvement Worker was present.

The DVD covers different areas of young people's lives including their aspirations for education, training and employment; their worries and concerns; and ambitions for the future.

Both parents and professionals were surprised by some of the issues that the young people raised. Some observed that compared with non-disabled young people those with disabilities faced uncertainties about their future, for example worries about whether they would get funding for a specialist college place and transport concerns. The young people were very well aware of the hoops their parents and carers had had to jump through in the past and the worries they had about the future. The film had a strong impact on parents and carers who saw the DVD at the conference, some becoming upset as they become aware of how much the young people were picking up on their anxieties. Professionals there with non-disabled children of the same age were able to compare their freedom to choose in comparison with the difficulties for these young people.

The interviews ended by giving the young people the opportunity to ask questions of the people at the conference. Transport was one of the biggest issues and one young person talked about having to get three buses to go to the local college. He was worried about how he would do it and the time involved. His questions were able to be put directly to the representative for Nexus (Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive) at the conference and presented a powerful example of how local services needed to address barriers of this type. Nexus have spoken to parents' groups about different concessionary schemes partly as a result of the experience.

## Challenges

As well as putting conference delegates on the spot, one of the difficult issues to emerge from the DVD was that sometimes the aspirations of parents and young people could be very different. Although hearing the views of disabled young people could be uncomfortable for service providers and parents, giving them a voice in this way did enable franker conversations about their future pathways. This experience echoed the findings of the employment report where schools reported a small number of cases where parents were either being over protective or, alternatively, were unwilling to accept their child's disabilities and the limitations they may place upon them. It was clear that there was sometimes a mismatch between what young people said they wanted and this depended on who they were talking to.

As a pilot authority for Individual Budgets, support planning for some pilot families has taken a person centred approach aided by AHDC Children's Involvement Worker who spends time with children at their schools before the planning sessions. Your Voice Counts, a local third sector provider, provided independent advocacy and support brokerage for those taking part in the pilot. In some cases this has allowed young people to express aspirations often just to take part in ordinary activities, such as going to the pub, which their families were unaware of.

Clearly continuing personalisation of planning processes in Gateshead would give young people greater opportunities to voice their aspirations at an earlier stage, particularly where they are supported by advocacy.

## Successes

### Influencing practice and policy

After the conference, the multi-agency strategic disability group, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, followed up issues raised in the DVD with providers. Equipping local colleges to provide a better service for young disabled people in terms of running more appropriate courses will be a key outcome. Improving access through improved home to college transport is also under review. A number

of different projects are underway to help young people develop travel confidence during transition.

While the DVD was focused on practical areas such as college placements and courses, transport, housing and employment, the wider implications for assessment and resources have had an impact at strategic level too. Gateshead's multi-agency transition protocol, finalised in January 2011, picked up on the overarching issues raised through the DVD which was completed in the previous spring.

## Conclusions

The DVD as a mechanism for enabling disabled young people's voices to be heard has proved to be a powerful tool for change in Gateshead. By speaking directly, their views and experiences are beginning to change practice and shape strategic policy. Young people feel they are being listened to and their concerns are being addressed.

## Future potential benefits

Following on from the employment report and the DVD, a study is underway to look into what practical things can be done to support young people into employment, beginning with planning work experience right through to paid employment.

The aim is to develop exemplar pathways, such as health and beauty and sport, which practitioners can put forward during person centred reviews when work experience is being planned.

Work experience more aligned to young people's hopes and ambitions for work has been identified as important. In the past these have not always been available with work placements unrelated to young people's interests. Even where appropriate work placements are found, adequate support during the placement is not always in place. For example, in one case a young person working in a leisure centre missed lunch because nobody told him that he could take a break and he didn't have the confidence to ask.

Making sure young people are supported from the planning stage, through to FE placement and meaningful opportunities after education is now very much on the agenda, directly as a result of what young people have said.

A local college is involved in developing these pathways, partly as a result of their having a representative on the transition steering group which has commissioned the work.

## Barriers

Time constraints meant that young people with communication difficulties did not have the opportunity to take part in the DVD as it would have been more difficult to capture their views on camera. Instead the DVD focused on more verbal young people. However, the DVD was able to cover many of the issues faced by all disabled young people in transition.

## Lessons learned

- Young people don't have to be herded onto the stage at conferences, something which they may find overwhelming or intimidating. Carefully focused DVDs can bring their views to a wide range of people because they are portable and can be easily used in different settings.
- Using a professional company with experience of working with disabled young people means that technical support can compensate for problems of delivery which the young people may have, for example if they are difficult to hear because they are softly spoken or have communication difficulties.
- Understanding that the DVD will have a powerful impact on those listening, especially parents and carers, who may find it disturbing, and providers, who may find it challenging.

## Top tips

- Preparation is important. It's not enough to point the camera at young people. The Involvement Worker did a lot of work beforehand to make sure that the young people would know what would happen, and were ready for the bright lights as well as the camera, for example. It is also important that they understand what they will be asked about, prepared about what they want to say but also understand that they are free to not say anything if they don't want to.

- Maximise the impact of the DVD by using it in a variety of situations. As well as the conference, clips were made available on the LA website. It was also shown at the transition strategy group where hearing from the young people themselves had greater impact than a written report of their views.
- Follow-up with the young people is important to demonstrate that their input has had an impact. One of the Gateshead Connexions workers has met with the young people to tell them about what happened as a result of the conference.

## Key principles

Enabling disabled young people to express their views on issues which affect their lives is empowering and builds confidence. Using the DVD with professionals means the young people are able to influence service development and delivery and are making a positive contribution: one of the five key outcomes identified by Every Child Matters.

## What makes this type of participation good practice:

1. Professionally made DVDs can act as a powerful tool in bringing to life the experiences of disabled young people
2. Young people have evidence that their views have been recorded and will be heard by policy makers and providers

## Practical ideas in getting started with a DVD project:

1. Prepare young people beforehand so they are clear about what they want to say and what it will feel like to be on camera.
2. Use a professional company with experience of working with disabled young people.
3. Make the experience fun and as relaxed as possible so choose familiar locations or places where the young people go for enjoyment such as discos or youth clubs.

## Key Policy

Participation is a key element of the Core Offer made under the Aiming High 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:

- Information
- Transparency
- Assessment
- Participation
- Feedback

## Useful resources

- **How to involve children and young people with communication impairments in decision-making**, CDC. (2008)
- **Transition guide**, CDC, 2007.  
A transition guide for all services: key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people
- **A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation** includes a chapter on disabled children's participation in the UK. (Routledge, August 2009)
- **Hear by Right** – a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active participation of children and young people.
- **Making Ourselves Heard** is a project which aims to ensure the active participation of disabled children and young people in all decisions directly affecting them in the development of their local communities, in the strategic planning of services, and in all aspects of the work of the Council for Disabled Children.

- **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.
- **Participation (DVD) case study:** A group of 10 young people produced a film about participation for staff induction or training. Available from Young Londoners Participation Network (YLPN)  
[www.participationworks.org.uk/networks/regional-networks/london](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/networks/regional-networks/london)
- **Development of Education, Training and Employment Pathways for Disabled Young People**, Aiming High for Disabled Children and Gateshead Council, report by Kath Albiston and Jenny Dedeyan, April 2010  
[www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/Care/aiming/Employmentpathwaysreport.pdf](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/DocumentLibrary/Care/aiming/Employmentpathwaysreport.pdf)
- **Individual Budgets for Disabled Children and their Families**, Aiming High for Disabled Children and Gateshead Council, report by Michael Lemin, Individual Budgets Development Officer, January 2011  
[www.gateshead.gov.uk/Care%20and%20Health/ChildrenandFamilies/DisabledChildren/IndividualBudgets/Home.aspx](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Care%20and%20Health/ChildrenandFamilies/DisabledChildren/IndividualBudgets/Home.aspx)

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## **National Transition Support Team (NTST)**

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

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](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc)

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