

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: LB Havering and Click start

Introduction

Click start – an accessible information website providing information on transition for disabled young people, their families and carers, and professionals.

Overview

Although Havering had a comprehensive information booklet for young people they wanted to consider how this information could be web based. They joined up with a number of other local areas to support the use of “Click start” a web based information system for young people and their families during their transition to adult life. It also became clear that the web site would be invaluable to professionals supporting young people through transition as it would enable them to sign post to other services and relevant information.

Main transferable learning points

- Consider terminology carefully as some young people are put off by the word “disability”. Equally others don’t like the term “special needs”. Ensure a shared language between different organisations such as Education and Health
- Be clear about what information you want to include on a web site. It is worth considering a steering group of young people to ensure the information is both relevant and accessible to them
- Ensure that you have information relevant to young people to go on the website and that there is not one particular bias.
- It is vital to have information that reflects the complexity of transition and covers resources from both children’s services and adult services as well as universal opportunities

Introduction

The following examines the work and outcomes of LB Havering, through the Transition subgroup of the local LLDD Partnership board in collaboration with other LAs and partners in delivering online information on post-16 transition and related themes to stakeholders on a local and pan-regional level.

It looks at the development of the project, input from partners, quality of the web-based platform, issues of accessibility and content. It also considers differences in perceptions in terms of the audience and functions of online information gateways.

Background

In 2008 LB Havering through the Transition subgroup was successful in a bid to fund a directory of Services for young people 14-19 with learning difficulties and disabilities. The What’s Next Directory included health, education, social care, specific services such as advocacy and general information on rights and entitlements. The directory was launched at a borough wide event and copies were given to all services, schools and individuals known to the LA within the target group. Feedback was sought on the usefulness of the directory and the following issues emerged:

- This was an extremely useful tool for professionals as it crossed a wide range of services
- It was useful in informing choices for parents and carers of young people with disabilities post-16

- It was an important ancillary tool at annual reviews but many parents and young people did not approve of the term disabilities. In some instances they claimed it had a negative impact on the young person's self esteem
- Some schools and parents felt that the spectrum of information was too wide and much of the content was irrelevant to individual needs
- There was an added issue that changes to services, college courses etc. would necessitate re-publication on a regular basis.

Reviewing the project it was apparent that some of the negatives needed to be addressed and the young people themselves had to be more involved.

Aims and Objectives

- The Advisory Teacher charged with the task concluded that the best way to keep information updated was through a website. This would also allow a degree of personalisation as specific information could be searched. At this stage accessibility proposals were limited to plain English, supported by images and symbols with the option of enabling BrowseAloud for those who preferred to listen. The naming of the website would use the term additional needs as it would reflect the wider cohort of vulnerable learners and be sensitive to individual perceptions.
- The intention was to provide a central point of information that was accessible, easily edited and that could serve the purposes of informing parents/carers, professionals and young people in Key Stage 4 onwards. It was envisaged that the content would include activities that would be used in citizenship lessons and other educational settings to improve learner knowledge and hence choice.
- There had already been some contact with other LAs to look at their experience with accessible information. Through the LSC East LDD network a number of interested LAs and agencies

became aware that there were ESF

- funds available for collaborative projects. The initial group comprised Tower Hamlets, Havering and Ellingham Supported Employment. After discussions, the LSC decided to support the proposal which then took a step further where the Rix Centre based at the University of East London were approached to cost such a project. An application for funding was successful and the Rix Centre along with Ellingham Employment was commissioned to deliver the website which became known as Click start.

Approach

- The initial specifications considered accessibility, content and an element of supported employment in the research and production of the website.
- As this was a collaborative project it was important to get as many east London LAs involved. The Rix Centre coordinated a number of consultations were arranged
- The funding was for the financial year 2008/9 and the intention was to meet a number of criteria, one of which was the number of accessible websites produced. It should be noted that some of the specifications in the final document were not subject of consultation with the original LA representatives.
- It became apparent that there was some divergence regarding the content and audience of the websites. The Rix Centre and Ellingham had a history of collaboration. The project was viewed from an Adult Social Care perspective which did not always converge with the Havering perspective that the audience would not necessarily be prospective social care clients. However it would be fair to say that
in most local authorities it was adult social care who took the lead although it did impact on content and organisation.

- Click start is a highly accessible platform for online information. As it is based on freeware it provides a cost effective solution. The main difficulties have arisen over organisation of content as this relates to the ease that specific information can be found and the content itself. As a shared resource it does allow different portals to link with each others' sources. In the financial year 2010-11 the local SEN Hub funded further development of the search engine. This will be concluded towards the end of March 2011
- Other London boroughs involved in Click start are: Redbridge, Newham, Hackney, Lewisham and Hammersmith and Fulham. Redbridge have been involved in Click Start since Phase 1 in 2008/9, a fundamental outcome being their development of a team of staff from Adult Services & Children's Services working together in a joined up way. Hammersmith and Fulham secured funding to employ a Team Co-ordinator and two young people to be trained to work on the website. Some of the challenges faced by these boroughs also included usability and organisation of content, as already
- mentioned, but also challenges around committing resources and attracting users. Five other London boroughs - Bexley, Camden, Enfield, Ealing and Hounslow - have also started negotiations to take up the Click start package.

Challenges

What problems did you encounter?

As stated earlier there was a divergence in what the partners perceived as the function of the project. The individual websites allowed for information to be organised according to the editors' different perspectives. A major challenge was how to structure all the different information using a common terminology for ease of access and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

How did you overcome/deal with them?

It became apparent that the portal model, which was based on six sections individual to each authority/area was if anything a barrier to sharing resources. Research with users showed that the hierarchy of information was over-complicated, time consuming and mostly unnecessary.

Working in cooperation with the North London SEN Hub funds were sought in 2010 to modify the search page and eliminate the need for portals. This process is nearly completed and the solution that has been adopted is using a simple drop down menu that allows the user to define the key topics, audience and local area before searching. This menu contains all the accessibility features of the 'wikis' themselves.

It did and still does present another challenge as the tagging of information has to follow a common terminology to ensure accurate search results.

What would you do differently next time?

In retrospect the issue of organisation and content should have been clearer on the initial contract. Whilst the technical specifications exceeded initial expectations and the use of freeware gave the platform sustainability by avoiding costly software licence charges the lack of common perspective hindered collaboration and in some instances encouraged duplication which is precisely what the cross-borough approach intended on avoiding.

The initial focus should have been organisation as opposed to creating the wiki mini-sites which had a target number set into the contract and were a distraction from the overarching aim of the project.

Successes

Specific challenges to the work/project that you overcame.

The issue of collaboration and common resource building was overcome through the Rix Centre encouraging borough editors researching the other portals and agreeing on rationalizing information through web links to

specific information. The sessions they provided for this were invaluable.

What were the biggest contributors to these successes?

The professionalism and patience of editors, the persistence of the Rix Centre and the positive feedback from local authorities yet to be involved were the most important factors in driving the project forward.

Benefits of the project.

Each local authority or organisation will have a different perspective. In Havering it has created an opportunity for different services to contribute towards enabling young people with additional needs to maximize both their learning and knowledge of opportunities as well as better informing carers of future options. The Learning Support Service in Havering took the approach that much of this work would be propagated in schools and FE settings. This is now proving to be the case as the resources are now becoming integrated into the learning experience of our target group of young people.

Feedback from young people and their families.

Small groups of young people were involved in the production of the websites and were involved in deciding on the content. The feedback from this group was positive as not only did they feel their opinions were valued but the editing sessions were interesting and fun. The use of the information is often facilitated through teaching staff and feedback from this group was that it was a valuable resource albeit with reservations about some of the now resolved problems regarding information searching.

It would be fair to say that responses from carers were more varied. Those who had a focus on post-16 opportunities were generally positive, whilst some of the other aspects of transition were considered less informative. It was the initial feedback from carers that quickly pinpointed the excessive layers in the organisation of information.

Conclusion

What was achieved?

Havering now has a flexible and accessible platform to deliver online information and resources that will benefit our young people through improved information and guidance and shared educational resources.

Benefits that have already been realised.

Young people are clearer on future options and the actions that should be taken to achieve their ambitions. A range of services now use Click start sites to host resources. Participation is constantly widening as the project becomes more widely known.

Future potential benefits.

The flexibility of the platform will allow a more holistic range of resources to be available as more services and users get involved. The accessibility features will eventually allow a more multi-sensory approach to web information building that in turn will be more user-friendly to those with communication needs.

Lessons learned (particularly those relevant to a wider audience).

Be clear on initial specifications. It can avoid a lot of unnecessary work in the future.

Ensure clarity of organisation. It will better inform the content.

Trial with users at an early stage as it is their experience that will dictate whether such resources are used or not.

Future plans.

We need to rationalise some information and amplify on other. Taking into consideration some of the far-reaching changes that are on the horizon for those with additional needs the next year may be the optimum time to develop this.

To see the evidence of this work please visit www.clickstart.org.uk and choose the Havering site.

How to...?

- Key issues and principles
Identify the intended audience and how and where information will be delivered. Do not rely solely on the 'on-line information' idea
- Use simple templates as a platform for any information resources
- Organise before producing
- Seek continuous feedback
- Research before creating; there is a lot of useful information out there.

Barriers

Different services have different terms. Create an agreed common terminology that is comprehensible by the target client group. This may sound easy but education and social care can often use similar terms for different concepts.

Make sure you have common aims. You may need to compromise at first but it is eventually worth it.

How to turn it into good practice

Once you have a common language transition seems so much more comprehensible and less segregated. It also allows simpler use of English.

Integrate information sharing into what is already there. This may be a link to a well used website, integrated into citizenship lessons or Connexions activities. If people do not know it is there it will not be used.

Accept there is never an end point to editing there will always be changes and a need to update your resource.

Acknowledgements

The National Transition Support Team would like to thank the staff at London Borough of Havering for their assistance with this case study.

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

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