

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Leicester City Council

Introduction

Gateway Sixth Form College, Leicester: how a holistic approach prepares students for greater independence in adulthood.

Overview

Students at a Leicester college are able to test out living away from home during twilight sessions and overnight stays in an independent living facility on the campus. Gateway Sixth Form College provides a tailored curriculum for each disabled student learning independent living skills via the Broadview Flat programme or PSE. The curriculum emerges from the person centred planning in which each student and their parent/carers taking part in a Citizenship Review. The process identifies the skills that students need to live independently and reflects their wider hopes and aspirations for their future life.

The approach is part of a wider drive in Leicester to introduce person centred approaches in schools and local services, and to reduce reliance on residential care and promote independent living.

Main transferable learning points

- Trying out new experiences through independent living and work placements gives disabled young people tangible evidence on which to test out their skills and base their aspirations and decisions.
- As part of the twilight and overnight experience, students are supported to access leisure and social activities. This links with the broader Aiming High agenda around short breaks and the emphasis of the Citizenship Review in helping young people meet their wider aspirations in life.
- Using high quality trained support staff enables colleges to cover out of hours

sessions effectively and mitigates the time pressures on college staff.

Introduction

Although this case study focuses mainly on the work of Gateway College to increase the independence of its students with learning disabilities, the work is very much part of the wider approach being taken in Leicester by local services and agencies.

In 2008 Leicester City Council received £1.7 million to transform services for disabled children and young people. Short breaks were the focus of most of the funding but another key area was improving disabled young people's experience of transition. The city council has also won two bids to pioneer work under the Right to Control and Jobs First programmes.

The Council's approach to transition is characterised by a multi-agency approach through Adult Social Care, Health and Education services coming together with schools, further education, Connexions, parents and carers, and the voluntary sector. The Transitions Partnership Group (TPG) is made up of multi-agency colleagues, parents and carers, and learning disabled adults. The group has led on the design of a transitions pathway, and continues to lead on developments and improvements for the transitions process.

Service users also help in the shaping of transition services and the TPG has links with Big Mouth, a forum for disabled young people.

Through their Forum set up in 2008, parent/carers have been proactive in working with the Aiming High for Disabled Children agenda, helping with the bid for funding from

the Transition Support Programme Innovation and Outcomes fund to extend the scope of the independent living facility at Gateway College. The Parents/Carer's forum has two representatives on the TPG, which Gateway College reports to.

Leicester's Aiming Higher Disability Group is chaired by VESA (Vocational Education support agency) which provides a range of services for schools and colleges and works to develop education and training for 13 to 19 year-olds in Leicester and the county. Delivering Aiming High is part of the Leicester Multi-Agency Strategy for Disabled Children and Young People.

Background

Gateway Sixth Form College in Leicester moved to a new college campus in August 2009, and an independent living facility, the Broadview Flat, was incorporated at a significant capital cost. The Flat is a fully accessible residential facility equipped with a rise and fall kitchen area, dining and sitting areas and shower/bathroom. As well as helping prepare young people with independent living skills, the facility also provides the opportunity for different professionals to carry out assessments of young people's support needs.

The idea for the flat and the Broadview programme came from the experience of a local family who built an extension on their own home for their disabled daughter because there was nowhere she could try out the skills needed to achieve independent living. When the time came to create a new campus for Gateway College, staff were asked to contribute ideas and the creation of Broadview Flat became a reality.

Gateway successfully bid for six months funding from the Innovations and Outcomes fund to run an extended programme in the evenings and overnight in Broadview Flat. Along with money from the Aiming High short breaks fund and Adult Services' Learning Disabilities development fund, the college was able to recruit and train staff in person centred approaches from September 2010. The funding allowed for an existing member of staff to develop a personalised curriculum for each young person and for care support to be bought

in from a local agency to support the twilight and residential overnight stays.

The main target during the six months between September 2010 until March 2011 was to develop a structured independent living skills training programme informed by person centred reviews for 12 students.

Alongside a broad range of curriculum experiences, including foundation tier learning and a retail vocational course, the day-time curriculum for the college's Challenge students includes the opportunity to access the Broadview programme. Other students are able to access independent living skills as part of their PSE course. These include students working at higher levels but who need a lot of help with independent living skills. In the past many of these students, particularly those high functioning students with ASD, had been overlooked even though many aspired to take up university places.

Whether they are students on the Challenge course or those with aspirations to enter higher education, many have never experienced staying away from parents before. As well as taking part in day time training sessions on a one to one basis, they are offered twilight sessions in the early evening and experience living independently through overnight stays.

Aims and Objectives

The main objective is to raise the student's social skills, planning skills, time management skills, shopping skills, self advocacy and general awareness of healthy living skills. Progress/achievement of these skills is monitored via person centred plans.

The programme has the potential for young people to develop their independence so they are able to secure employment, access higher education and achieve their wider aspirations in life.

Approach

Citizenship reviews

Gateway College staff have been trained in person centred approaches, for example facilitating Citizenship Reviews which address the holistic needs of students and focus on

student's aspirations for work and their future lives.

Citizenship Reviews involve a person centred planning meeting which, for some young people, is their first experience of talking about what they want to do in the future. In the hour-long session, they get the opportunity to discuss their aspirations with college staff and parents. For many it is also the first time they have heard lots of positive things about themselves from staff and parents. Before the meeting, they and their parents are asked to identify things they can do and things they cannot do via a skills checklist. Parents have been very supportive of the process, which identifies targets in areas such as personal care, communication, health etc.

A scheme of work and action plan comes out of the Citizenship Review with a focus on identifying the skills the students need to work on. These can range from washing clothes to budgeting.

As well as practical skills, students are also helped to consider different aspects of their life such as the pros and cons of moving out of the family home. A focus on sexual health may be included if it emerges that a young person is sexually active.

The Broadview programme is made up of ten units beginning with Getting to Know You and taking students through each of the steps they need to live independently. For example, students learn to manage money including how to use plastic to pay for purchases in shop, how to understand a utility bill and the different ways of paying such as cash cards and credit cards.

Students are reminded of their targets, for example via cue cards and wall displays and constant monitoring takes place at the start and finish of each practical task by asking the students what they have tried, what they have learned, what they are pleased about and what they are concerned about. Once a task is carried out confidently, they plan the next task from their skills curriculum.

Twilight sessions

Students are encouraged to put skills into practice during twilight sessions. They plan, shop for and prepare meals, price up leisure activities and organise outings. During the twilight sessions staff had thought the students would probably access an activity in the local community but some of them had different ideas about what they wanted to do. Three girls, who are very good friends but who have little opportunity to mix outside college because they live far apart, were keen to have independent travel training. They saw that as key to a night out at a restaurant in the city centre. Being able to plan the journey, work out the cost of the evening, pick out a restaurant and enjoy a meal was really enjoyable for the three who are keen to repeat the experience. Support workers accompanied them and observed how they handled money and coped with travelling independently as well as their social interaction with each other and other people.

Travel confidence is something which Leicester's support planners have identified as an issue particularly for disabled young people seeking employment. As a pilot authority for Jobs First, Leicester offers support plans that combine personalisation with employment. Travel training is a crucial step in helping young people access community facilities and achieve aspirations of getting a job and living independently. Both Leicester College and Gateway provide travel training; one of the authority's special schools Ellesmere, has a dedicated worker who achieves good success rates with students developing travel independence; and other organisations such as Remploy and a local voluntary organisation, Values, have travel programmes for young disabled people.

Overnight stays

Both twilight sessions and overnight stays involve a good deal of planning by staff. For overnight stays students are encouraged to practice planning, shopping and cooking their own meal, deciding what to do during the evening, try out the Flat's equipment such as the shower, television and DVD player and finish by locking up. Although the flat has its own separate entrance and is, in effect, an independent building, support staff are nearby

and an alarm system means they can be contacted in an emergency. The College took enormous care in the recruitment of support staff interviewing 15 people from a respected local agency before deciding on the six staff members who would work with them on the programme. Consistency has been an important aspect, and the same six support workers have so far taken part in the twilight and overnight sessions.

“Before I felt nervous, really nervous. But I want to do it again. It’s the first time I’ve ever done it [been away from home].”

Gateway student describes her experiences staying over in the flat.

Links

Within college

When students complete the Broadview course, a final review of their progress will identify where connections will need to be made both within college and with services outside the college. For continuing students this will involve passing information to their tutor for the following year. While there is no requirement to hold annual reviews outside of school settings, the idea of person centred planning is becoming embedded into the approach of the college. All students at Gateway undertake a learner review and for the Broadview graduates, this will build on their Citizenship Review.

Schools and universities

The Aiming High disability group has brought people and agencies together including three local universities, Connexions and FE colleges, including Gateway, focusing on a widening participation programme.

Westgate School, the special school which has pioneered person centred planning in Leicester, now has transition links with the college so that during the summer term pupils are able to spend time in the college before the move in September. The school and the college share a Connexions personal adviser.

As pupils who have benefited from person

centred planning at the school come through to Gateway, the college hopes to build on this with its own person centred approach.

Adult social services

For students who are moving on, follow up at the end of the course can mean engaging with some of the services available in Leicester, such as help with housing or employment and Adult Social Care. For one student, who is a looked after young person, it is likely that the information about her progress and future aims will contribute to an independent living review and inform her support plan. Detailed information, down to the sort of equipment she finds useful, will be passed on to her social worker and will help with transition.

For the college, working with Leicester’s Transitions Partnership Group has brought staff together with key people from the local authority, private and voluntary sectors, and is enabling a more multi-agency approach.

For example, Gateway’s work fits within Adult Social Services new Supported Living strategy. And working with Adult Social Care has meant that 20 Gateway students have been able to do work experience at the nearby Tesco.

The Gateway College independent living model may be replicated by Adult Social Services’ Supported Living Project which is considering establishing a self contained unit for under 25s to enable them to test out independent living.

Despite a number of living support schemes in the pipeline, Leicester has one of the highest groups of disabled people in residential care and increasing their opportunities to access independent living via accommodation from Leicester’s 22,000 council properties is a growing priority. Leicester is currently reshaping its housing policies to enable more disabled young people to have the opportunity to live independent lives in self contained accommodation.

The work of the Supported Living Project Manager, Shirley Jones, currently has a particular focus on young people. As well as sitting on the transition sub-group, she has been able to contribute to a recent review of

how housing is allocated in the city, pointing out that young people tend to be disadvantaged under the current system.

Challenges

Concerns about health and safety

For Gateway College, planning twilight and overnight sessions has been time consuming and sometimes difficult to negotiate with parents, carers and Social Services. Although parents have overall been very supportive, some have had concerns about health and safety issues.

Young people and parents/carers can be very anxious beforehand and need to be reassured that staff is on site. In some cases sons and daughter have never been away from home before. It helps that support staff who are nearby during overnight stays have access to a 24 hour helpline staffed by nurses.

Time constraints on staff

Time constraints represent the greatest barriers to extending the programme. The Citizenship Reviews take a considerable amount of time for staff. As well as the hour-long meeting with the young person and parents/carers, staff are engaged in planning and follow up which makes it hard to extend the programme beyond the year or to a larger number of post-16 students.

Successes

Several of the first group of 12 students to begin the Broadway Programme has accessed the twilight and residential facility.

Their views give a good picture of the success of the programme so far:

One student, a wheelchair user on an IT course has experienced staying away from home before at his special school but is excited to be trying it at the Broadview Flat:

“I want do a degree in business studies and may live away from home so it’s good practice for that.”

Another student who enjoyed the twilight

session and has a taxi to attend college enjoyed the experience of independent travel to the restaurant. Learning to use buses is one of her aims which she hopes will unlock greater independence. She said:

“That’s something I definitely want to do now.”

One student describing her overnight stay said:

“I would love to do it again. I felt nervous but I rang my mum and best friend. I had coffee and tea in bed.”

Conclusion

What was achieved

- Twelve students began the Broadway programme and most have completed the training with several taking part in twilight and overnight sessions.

Benefits already realised

- Students feel their views are taken seriously and they have the support of parents/carers and staff to achieve their aspirations.
- Young people are better equipped to deal with many aspects of independent living.

Future potential benefits

- Links can be made with other agencies to progress some of the aims and aspirations identified through the Citizenship Review.
- Young people are better equipped to make decisions about important aspects of their lives such as whether to move out of the family home.

Lessons learned

- Good preparation prior to their person centred reviews is essential for young people and their family/carers.

The work of Gateway College to develop the independence of disabled young people has to be seen in the context of increasing personalisation in Leicester, both in local special schools where person centred reviews for young people in transition are established and from social care services who offer personalised approaches to

those disabled young people who may require social care in adulthood or who are being supported in transition to become independent. Ultimately the approach should be embedded in all settings and the young people coming through to Gateway in the future will have already experienced person centred planning which should help streamline the approach for the college and ensure continuity for the young people.

Why is the Gateway approach good practice?

- A personalised approach to independent living skills can focus on a young person's individual needs and aspirations.
- Extending the curriculum to twilight and overnight sessions provides each student with the opportunity to test out their new skills, try out a new experience in relative safety, and judge for themselves if would enjoy living independently.

Top tips

- Build a tailored curriculum for each young person around person centred planning approaches
- Work with parents in advance and encourage them to visit the flat as this inspires confidence and any concerns can be addressed at the outset.
- Ensure consistency of support staff and offer prior training in the person centred approach.
- Make links with other agencies to widen students' opportunities after college.

Key policy and legislation

- **The Equality Act 2010** aims to protect disabled people and prevent disability discrimination.
- **Autism Act 2010** which requires the Secretary of State to produce an adult autism strategy and issue statutory guidance on supporting adults with autism for local authorities and health

authorities.

Policy Framework

- **Leicester Multi-Agency Strategy for Disabled Children and Young**
- **People 2009 - 2011**
- **Aiming High for Disabled Children** has represented a key impetus for service transformation in Leicester. The programme sought to improve transition processes for young disabled people moving into adult life.
- Participation is a key element of the Core Offer made under the Government's 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
- **Person Centred Planning: schools and transition**
This is part of a series of good practice guides on person centred planning published by the Putting People First and Valuing People Now teams. It is intended to show how person-centred thinking, planning and reviews can be useful in schools and in transition. (DH, April 2010)
- **Valuing People and Valuing People Now** Personalisation described on: <http://www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk/valuing-people-now/personalising>
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission** www.equalityhumanrights.com
- **Aiming High for Disabled Children** www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/
- **Action for Kids**

Useful resources

- **Making Ourselves Heard: exploring disabled children's participation**, Kate Martin, CDC, 2009.
Based on a series of 8 seminars with local authorities, this book sets out the current policy context for disabled children and young people's participation, outlines the barriers and challenges to effective participation and highlights what is working well.
- **Transition guide** CDC, 2007.
A transition guide for all services: key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people

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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

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