

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Suffolk County Council (Person centred planning)

Introduction

This case study describes how Suffolk has developed a project to embed person centred approaches in all special schools with the long term goal that person centred planning will be universal for disabled children in the authority.

Overview

Training has been at the heart of work in Suffolk schools on person centred planning. A two year programme started with training up staff to facilitate person centred reviews and to support planning, and continued with the development and delivery of a training programme of person centred thinking, facilitators' training and training for parents in the skills needed to take an active part in reviews. A Suffolk pupil referral unit with a growing number of young people with complex needs has been one of the first schools to successfully pilot a person centred planning approach to transition reviews. Now a pool of highly trained trainers, facilitators and support planners are pushing forward the personalisation agenda across Suffolk's schools with a particular focus on the transition process.

Main transferable learning points

Person centred planning at transition often does not take any more time or preparation, but focuses on the important issues to young people and results in a clear and focused action plan that is more likely to be acted on.

Person centred reviews are more holistic and identify what needs to be done. Young people receive more personalised and joined up services as a result.

Action planning remains live with constant review of action points.

Young people grow in confidence and their parents have increased trust in the education system.

Introduction

The local authority in Suffolk has developed a project to embed person centred approaches in all special schools with the long term goal that person centred planning will be universal for disabled children in the authority. The process is intended to inform commissioning and provision and improve the aspirations and choices of disabled young people.

Training of staff in person centred thinking and planning was the first step in achieving these goals. Now a pool of trainers, facilitators and support planners, who have received substantial training, are pushing forward the personalisation agenda with a particular focus on the transition process. Ian Hart, Person Centred Planning Manager for Suffolk, has the role to champion the person centred approach across the authority and look for opportunities to kick start it in schools.

Background

PCP Project Drivers

In common with many other areas, Suffolk recognised that, from the perspective of young people and their families, transition from children's services to adult services was often confusing and disjointed. In the past disabled young people moved from education into day care, effectively being expected to fit the available provision rather than the provision being tailored to meet their needs and aspirations.

While Suffolk has a good track record of building in transition planning to its work, greater emphasis on personalisation meant there was a need to review its processes and take a fresh look at what was needed and provided. The Transition Support Programme provided the impetus while the extra funding it brought was useful, particularly as it made it possible to trial ideas.

As well as continuing Government pressure to personalise education, a new generation of parents are more aspirational for their children. In the past parents were often more concerned to maintain the security of the status quo. Now parents want children to have as much independence as possible and jobs, and this too is driving personalisation of services.

In the pupil referral unit, one of the settings where the person centred planning approach was piloted in Suffolk, there was a growing number of young people with complex needs. A new approach was needed to meet those needs because at the same time it was felt that there was a general lack of a student voice and input regarding their future and learning preferences. There was also concern about the lack of attendance at meetings of pupils, parents and professionals.

Linking into Strategic Structures

The Transition Steering Board in Suffolk provides a strategic direction and monitoring forum with the aim to ensure transition planning informs the whole range of departments, agencies and commissioning and that transition is on everyone's agenda. Its membership includes representatives from schools and FE colleges, health services and integrated services and key people within the LA including senior representatives from Connexions, the SEN champion for 14 – 19s and Ian Hart, whose post sits within adult and community services, funded by the Learning Disability Development Fund. Parent/carers and young people supported by the authority's advocacy service are also represented and help ensure that transition is not merely a box ticking exercise.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the work was, as a starting point, to embed person centred approaches in all special schools in Suffolk and, in particular, for disabled young people to be at the centre of planning during different stages of their transition. The belief is that if people who use services are to have positive control over their lives, then those who are around the person, especially those who do the day-to-day work, need to have person centred thinking skills.

By involving young people and their families, it was anticipated that they would take a leading role in planning their future, that plans would be used and acted on, and that services would be better able to personalise their provision and help young people achieve their aspirations as they moved into adulthood.

Implementation Plan

In year 1 of the Transition Support Programme, Suffolk commissioned and delivered a range of courses including: Train the Trainers; Person Centred Reviews Facilitators; and Support Planning. In year 2, work continued around the development and delivery of the training programme of Person Centred Thinking, Facilitators Training and training for parents in the skills needed to take an active part in reviews.

Schools set separate goals. For example, the PRU aim to have a PCR for all students before they begin in year 10 and for this to be reviewed every 6 months.

Approach

The establishment of the post of Person Centred Planning Manager, located within adult and community services within Suffolk, was a key to identifying schools and services open to the person centred planning approach. It brought together education services with adult services in a way which had not always been possible before. Trained facilitators managing the transition review process aimed to engage the full range of professionals able to contribute to the process.

In the pupil referral unit two members of staff were trained as facilitators at the outset with a team of four teachers receiving training six months later. Sessions were held with students and parents to explain about Person Centred Reviews. The students – initially a group of year 11s – were given time to complete a ‘My Review’ booklet setting or feeding into the agenda for the meeting while the format of the meeting was very much in their hands. For example, they chose music and refreshments which helped create a more informal atmosphere.

Paperwork was distributed to the relevant people in young people’s lives that had been invited to the review meeting. Attendance of parents and pupils at meetings has increased dramatically and in many cases parents have witnessed their child participate in a positive meeting regarding their future for the first time. This has led to increased confidence in the education system, a feeling that they are being listened to, increased hope that their child is growing in self confidence and a generally more positive outlook about the future.

For the students, organising and attending their review meeting has resulted in an increase in confidence. Students say that they get a chance to feel in control and listened to – from the snacks and the drinks right down to what’s not working and how they want their life to change. The process produces a clear and focused PCR action plan which is much more specific and pupil led. Not all targets are educational – one target was for a student to spend time with their father at weekends (this helped with family relations and helped the family to understand better the emotional needs of the child); another target was that a student wanted a hair makeover. This action point markedly increased the self esteem of the pupil.

Action plans are very much working documents and young people are seeing changes occurring. The action plan had dates next to each action point, with an interactive way of checking what action points had been achieved and what needed following up. The action plans were then checked fortnightly.

The PRU, for example, had a wall plan on which actions were constantly reviewed, rather than waiting until the next annual review a year

on to follow up decisions. Sometimes the young person does the checking which is satisfying for them and keeps the process alive. “Year 9 and 10 pupils are now buzzing about the process because they feel they have a voice.”

The approach has also changed the way the PRU organises admissions and staffing. A PCR is carried out before a student enters the PRU in Year 10, in effect changing how the PRU assesses and admits the students and the stage that they begin admissions assessments. Timetabling at the PRU now allows for teaching staff to be available to facilitate PCRs and changes to staff working arrangements and student attendance are being considered to create more staff time to fulfil Action Plans.

Challenges

- **Schools finding time to free up teachers**

Finding the time to free up teachers for training sessions was difficult for schools so the project offered ‘twilight’ sessions in person centred planning. There were still patchy responses although teachers who did take part said that they found the approach very useful. PRU staff felt that as the approach became embedded, reviews would be less labour intensive.

- **Concern about inspection**

Project organisers had to overcome the perception that the annual review of the statement must take a bureaucratic format. Concern about Ofsted inspection, in particular, drove schools to stick to what they saw as the rules governing the annual review meeting. In some cases this left no time to deal with key issues, and parents felt they never got to talk about what mattered. Schools needed “permission” to diverge from their normal practice. In fact, the project organisers found that the “rules” were often based on entrenched practice rather than the actual legal requirements governing the meeting. Some schools mistakenly believed that they had to separate the review of the statement from the transition review and tackle person centred planning separately too, potentially making the process very long and drawn out. By engaging in better preparation beforehand, the review

meeting could pull all those aspects together and focus on those issues which were of real concern to the young person and their family while fully meeting the legal requirements of the review. Review meetings now look at what isn't working, whether this is something simple like school meals or school transport, or more complex such as relationships breaking down at home or difficult relationships in school. The meeting has become a genuine opportunity to problem solve about both current and future issues. Often matters arise that don't directly affect the school, for example, a young person's problems with the effects of medication or their difficulties with sleeping or weight. With a wide range of services represented at the review meeting, a joined up service can extend way beyond classroom issues.

- **Concern about workload**

Some professionals have been anxious not to pick up a workload that is outside their own remit. But the success of involving a wide range of services has meant they have been able to focus on what their own service can provide, confident that other professionals are there to pick up their responsibilities. Young people have seen positive input from the professionals working with them which has strengthened and, in some cases, established working relationships. Students have said that it makes things actually happen. Although professionals are encouraged to attend review meetings, where this is not possible they are asked to contribute in writing.

- **Following up the process**

There remains a lack of clarity as to how person centred reviews should be recorded and passed to the LEA, and what additional information should be included. The core values and process that underpin person centred reviews might be compromised for the convenience of recording and processing and the perceived expectations of the LEA.

Chasing up action points can also be a real challenge, although in most cases the points are "just people doing their jobs".

Successes

- **Young people are central to their review**

Young people play a full role in their person centred review when it is set up in a comfortable and relaxed setting. Sessions with young people to explain about person centred reviews were positive experiences. Parents and young people find they are able to discuss 'big' issues, which would have been difficult to instigate in the 'old' style of meetings, such as wider family issues and realistic options post-16.

- **Reviews are more holistic**

Person centred reviews are naturally more holistic, which is beneficial to all parties. The project brought together education services with adult services in a way which had not always been possible before. The good engagement with Connexions and improving engagement from other services including health services, CAHMS, and social services is resulting in better provision for young people and a smoother journey to adulthood. The process has identified where more needs to be done. Currently two or three areas have emerged. These include future housing needs, especially where there are aspirations for the young people to live independently one day.

- **Good action plans "owned" by young people**

Good action plans highlighting some important issues have come out of the reviews. The person centred transition review often does not take any more time or preparation, but results in a clear and focused person centred action plan for the young person that will more likely be used and acted on. These plans are very much working documents with the process kept alive by constant monitoring of action points, sometimes by the young people themselves.

- **Professionals using the approach across their work**

While the process was designed to work in the context of transition, it is also being used with adults, children and young people, in a range of different service situations.

Conclusions

What was achieved

A growing number of school staff and other professionals have trained in person centred approaches with more in the pipeline; six facilitators now trained. Fifteen person centred transition reviews have been carried out.

Benefits already realised

Young people are being listened to: “quite often the young person will come up with the one thing everyone is afraid to mention”.

Reviews now talk about ‘what matters’ and problems are addressed.

Action planning remains live with constant review of action points.

Young people receive more personalised and joined up services on their journey to adulthood.

Young people grow in confidence and their parents have increased trust in the education system.

Future potential benefits

Action planning feeding into strategic planning and commissioning. Representatives from housing and mental health to sit on the Transition Steering Board are being sought.

Disabled young people having greater control of their lives and a smoother journey to adulthood.

Lessons learned

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

Spread out facilitators to evenly spread workload.

A greater involvement of a wider range of professionals means a reduced risk of individual professionals having to pick up work

outside their remit.

Schools willing to embrace person centred work have the ability to make this happen.

Future plans

With the majority of disabled children placed in mainstream, and still some way to go in special schools, the authority’s aim to extend person centred planning to all disabled children looks very ambitious. However, as those schools which have adopted the approach demonstrate success, other schools have begun to show interest. Disseminating the results of the project will be key to further take-up.

Key action points for the future include:

- Clarifying what is an acceptable paper trail from review to LEA, including permission to move away from the “template”.
- Sharing learning to evidence how concerns can be allayed e.g. DVD, celebration event
- Putting in place mentoring, support and development systems for school staff, to maintain quality of person centred work
- Developing systems to ensure that person centred reviews and planning dovetail into care management
- Correlating information from person centred reviews and plans to inform strategic action plan
- Establishing person centred thinking training as mandatory and a benchmark for all services
- Every school to have sufficiently trained person centred review facilitators
- To have a designated “person centred” coordinator/trainer to link directly with schools.

What makes Person Centred Planning good practice?

Person centred planning enables schools to meet legal requirements especially where better preparation is carried out. This ensures the meeting can focus on key issues, plan more effectively and solve problems

Person centred planning helps young people achieve their goals in line with the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Practical ideas in getting started with person centred planning

- Offer flexible training opportunities e.g. bite size sessions; twilight sessions
- Good preparation e.g. the family should be asked to complete relevant paperwork in advance of the review meeting
- Give plenty of time when sending out invitations to reviews meetings
- Good organisation of reviews essential particularly with regard to invitees e.g. time between reviews is needed for professionals involved in more than one review, and there should be a maximum of two reviews a day involving same professionals
- The format of the review should involve everyone. The venue needs to be well prepared with headings, posters, music, seating planned and snacks organised. The young person needs time to meet the facilitator and to check that they are happy with the set up of the room. It is important to allow the student to have time out if required and to decide on a signal prior to the review. Need to check with the student prior to the discussion if there is anything that they are not willing to talk about which has been documented on the posters
- Set out clear ground rules for the meeting – e.g. the five minute rule where an issue seems to be taking longer and

people are stuck, come back to it later and/or action plan it for a separate time

- Hold sessions beforehand with pupils and parents to explain about person centred reviews
- Inform everyone of the format of the review prior to the meeting
- Ask professionals who are unable to attend to send their thoughts regarding the pupil.

Key legislation and guidance

Section 328 (5) Education Act 1996

Requires LEAs to review a statement at least every 12 months.

Education (Special Educational Needs (England) (Consolidation) Regulations 2001 (as amended)

Reg 20 details the procedure for annual reviews of statements of children attending school (except for those in their 10th year of compulsory education); Reg 21 details the additional procedures for the Transition Review of statements of young people in their 10th year.

SEN Code of Practice, Chapter 9

Provides statutory guidance on annual reviews of statements.

The SEN Toolkit, section 9

Provides non statutory guidance on annual reviews.

Key Policy

Participation is a key element of the Core Offer made under the Government's Aiming High for Disabled Children 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.

Resources and organisations

A transition guide for all services

Key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people (DCSF, 2007). Available to download from the Transition Support Programme website.
www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk

Person centred planning toolkits

A toolkit from the Autism Education Trust.
www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Person Centred Planning Good Practice Guidance

This good practice guidance published by the Putting People First and Valuing People Now teams has been developed to help local areas understand how person-centred planning can help deliver Putting People First. It is one of the commitments in Valuing People Now (DH, 2010).
<http://valuingpeople.gov.uk/dynamic/valuingpeople373.jsp>

Teachernet

The Teachernet website includes information about annual reviews for disabled children with SEN.
www.teachernet.gov.uk

How to involve children and young people with communication impairments in decision-making

Produced by the Council for Disabled Children and Participation Works (NCB, 2008).
www.ncb.org.uk

We Can Dream!

A guide for young people with autistic spectrum disorders and their carers about how person centred planning and self-directed support can be used when making the transition from school or college to adult life (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2009)
www.fpld.org.uk

Communication for person centred planning

This information pack was designed to help staff, self advocates, families and friends to make communication better. The aim is to help people who are working in a Person Centred way, to better understand the communication styles of self advocates (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2005)
www.fpld.org.uk

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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.

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