

Case Study: Warwickshire County Council

Introduction

This case study describes how Warwickshire County Council developed a support brokerage model to support young people with autistic spectrum conditions who do not meet FACS criteria.

Overview

Data gathered from Year 8 meetings and case planning meetings in Warwickshire is used to inform commissioners within adult services of gaps in services for young adults in transition with high functioning autism.

This has led to the development of:

- a clear assessment pathway
- an autism broker service

The Learning Disability team within Adult Services now takes the lead in assessment of young people with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) under Fair Access to Care Services (FACS). Those who do not meet the FACS criteria may now be referred to the autism broker service for low level preventative support.

Main transferable learning points

- Transition structures that gather data early provide good evidence for developing and maintaining services focused on anticipated needs.
- Strong backing from elected representatives helps initiate and sustain new services.
- Reshaping existing services is a low cost way of developing new services for unmet needs.
- Low level support can help young people maintain tenancies, employment and independent living while preventing crises involving costly interventions from other services such as mental health and criminal justice.

Introduction

Young people in Warwickshire with ASC, who were often ineligible for services as they moved from education into adult lives, are now receiving support which is helping them hold down jobs and live independently. A modest amount of support, which can range from a single text every fortnight to two or three visits each week, is preventing problems reaching crisis point.

Background

It has been recognised by the government that too many adults with autism are unemployed and struggling to live independently. For young adults with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) who are high functioning, the difference between living full and independent lives and not coping can often be a matter of receiving modest support from local services. However, many are reliant on the care and support of their parents, both financially and for practical help, as their needs go unrecognised or unmet by local services.

Some young people with ASC in Warwickshire were slipping through the net in this way. This was a problem identified by the evidence arising from the authority's own processes. At transition all the young people coming through the school system who have statements are discussed in Year 8 by the multi-agency Integrated Disability Service (IDS) within Children's Services.

The cases of young people who will need an assessment and possibly services from Adult Services are then taken to joint meetings with Adult Services. It was this process which identified a gap in service for young people on the autistic spectrum who did not have a learning disability as defined by Adult Services, nor an acute mental health difficulty or physical disability. Autism was not recorded as a primary need, so the IDS could not report on it. There was no team in place to take on the assessment of these young people to check whether they met Fair Access to Care criteria so it was not possible to assess whether a young person had high or substantial need. Even if there had been, there was no service there anyway.

Importantly, as Children's Services were considering how to resolve the problem, members of the IDS were asked by elected members of the scrutiny committee to talk to them about transition and about the needs of young people with ASC. The IDS was able to follow up with a paper which made a business case for providing more support. The corresponding lead for transition in Adult Services took the business case to a senior management group where it was agreed to provide the support by reassigning a low level support worker post from within the Adult Services team for those aged 50+, PHILLIS (Promoting Health and Independence through Low Level Integrated Support). The reassigned post of autistic spectrum condition service broker resulted in one full time person working specifically with adults on the autistic spectrum.

Aims and objectives

- To be better prepared to meet the needs of high functioning young people with ASC in transition as they moved out of education into adulthood
- To develop clear pathways for young people with ASC in transition
- To support young people with ASC live successfully in the community
- To support young people with ASC maintain employment and live independently.

Approach

Once the decision to fill the gap was made it was necessary to ensure a transition pathway for young people with ASC. Except for individuals with a primary mental health need, an assessment of their needs under the Community Care Act and under Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria is carried out by the Learning Disability team in Adult Services. Those who do not meet the FACS criteria may be signposted to other services or offered low level services via the Learning Disability team. It was recognised that not meeting their needs could eventually lead to crises and expense in terms of providing alternative services in prisons, acute mental health services, etc.

The low level support is delivered via the autistic spectrum condition service broker whose post was created in June 2009. The broker has experience of working with people with ASC and her skills have very much enhanced the experience of young people who have been helped to develop links in community e.g. accessing the job centre and specialist advice services, and have been supported in employment, education and training. The success of the new service is demonstrated by the increasing demand for her service which less than a year from its inception has resulted in a decision to create another post. About 26 young people are currently being supported with nine on the waiting list.

Only those individuals not supported by Adult Social Care services are eligible for the service which provides practical support.

Typical interventions include:

- Help to develop coping strategies
- Support with planning daily activities and routine
- Support to understand and develop each individual's personal social network
- Help to reduce anxiety
- Signposting to other services/agencies
- Support to access employment, further education or training

- Checking benefit entitlement
- Support to find housing/specialist housing related support
- Support to set up home/independent living skills
- Accessing social activities, exercise, health and wellbeing services
- Support to look after or care for somebody with an ASC
- Referral to Adult Health or Social Care services if required.

Those people with greatest need may be seen two or three times a week. Those who need a higher level of care, for example if their needs were underestimated at the initial assessment and those who hit crises, may be identified as likely to meet the FACS criteria and can be referred quickly without having to go back to the start of the process.

The ASCS broker is also setting up social groups in two districts – Stratford and Rugby. Carers and users will have their own groups to take part in relaxation techniques, learn communication skills, and discuss money management.

Challenges

It took time to resolve eligibility criteria and the period of support. Initially it was envisaged that the support would be time limited and that adults with an ASC would not need long term help. In reality, it has been found that the young people often need long term support although the level of that support may decrease as they go along. For some young people this can mean as little as a text every couple of weeks with follow up only if there is a problem or request. The knowledge that the ASCS broker is easy to reach is critical to their well being, and can relieve anxiety and prevent inappropriate dependence on other services such as GPs.

Successes

Structures supporting strategic decision making

The fact that Warwickshire's planning structures identified the problem from the evidence of its transition meetings was a cause of satisfaction to the members of the IDS team. The team includes specialist teachers, social care workers who work with disabled children; specialist advisers from Connexions, an occupational therapist, child development services, family key workers and short break workers. The IDS membership and process enabled information to be pulled together which fed into the transition process.

The scrutiny from elected members, who often hear of families' problems first hand through their contact with the public, was also helpful in prioritising action within Adult Services. Their support has been important in the development of the new service.

Reshaping services

Flexibility in reshaping services has meant that the new service has involved little extra cost: both posts arising from posts reassigned by Adult Services. Development of the work has been supported by the National Transition Support Team with part of a small Transition Support Programme grant of £7,500. The costs and benefits are clear. Apart from the low cost of mapping this new service, its preventative focus means substantial savings are made by other services.

Case studies

Individual success stories include a woman with Asperger's syndrome who was at risk of losing her job because she had reacted badly to a suggestion that she had been late, when being on time was something very important to her. The ASCS broker realised that there was a communication problem and was able to intervene to support her and those who were working with her, with the result that she kept her job.

In another case a young man who was living independently was in great distress because of the state of his flat. Although he liked order and routine, he was unable to organise the washing up and laundry and was on the verge of a breakdown which may have led to hospitalisation. By tackling the problem in small stages and providing him with a structured timetable he was able to establish routines for washing up at certain times of day and laundry on certain times of the week. His flat is now spotless. The young man is now being helped to manage his finances because he spends his money straight away and can end up with no money for food by the end of week.

Conclusion

Detailed information and high quality data about the needs of young people in transition were showing a gap in Adult Services at the same time as concern was expressed by elected members about the same group of young people with ASC. This was a group of young people who could become invisible when they left school unless they hit a crisis.

The resulting new assessment and transition pathway is now leading to practical and highly preventative support for these young people. With a second full time post being allocated after the first year, it is clear that the new service is meeting a good deal of previously unmet needs. The cost benefits of the new service seem obvious, particularly as both posts involved converting existing posts.

How to identify and make provision for young people in transition who do not meet the FACS criteria

Key principles and issues

- Ensuring strategic planning structures are in place to identify gaps in services
- Recognising that meeting low level needs for young people with ASC can prevent greater problems down the line
- Being prepared to reshape local services to meet needs.

Barriers

Rigid approaches towards the definition of learning difficulties under Fair Access to Care Services can be a barrier to high functioning young people with ASC being assessed and receiving services. Warwickshire took a pragmatic approach to this, deciding that the Learning Disability service was the nearest fit. In fact the legal definition of learning difficulties is wider in education precisely to encompass any difficulties which hinder learning as well as cognitive difficulties. This is why Children's Services in Warwickshire have been able to successfully identify young people who may go on to need Adult Services: they are already receiving help at school.

Practical ideas for delivering a low level support service for young people with ASC

- Use school information such as individual education plans or statements of special educational needs to identify young people with potential needs and to inform decision making about assessment and provision
- Use text messages, emails and social networking websites to keep in touch where minimal contact is all that is needed
- Signpost users of a low level service to further help from advice agencies, job centres etc.

Key legislation and policy

NHS and Community Care Act 1990	Provides an overarching duty in relation to assessment requiring 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 Disabled Persons (Services and Consultation and Representation) Act 1986	Requires local authorities to decide whether the needs of a disabled person call for the provision by the Local Authority of any services.
The Autism Act 2009	The Autism Act set out that the Government had to publish statutory guidance for local councils and local health bodies on the actions they need to take to meet the needs of adults with autism living in their area. This guidance was published on 17 December 2010.
Fair Access to Care Services and the Duty To Provide	Once a community care assessment is carried out, councils need to make decisions about whether to provide support or not to individuals. Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) provides councils with an eligibility framework for adult social care to identify whether or not the duty to provide or arrange services is triggered. The duty is triggered only for those people with eligible needs - that is needs above the threshold for services. Councils may take account of the resources available to them in deciding which needs to meet.

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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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