

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: West Berkshire

Introduction

This case study is about the process of starting to develop joint assessment in West Berkshire.

Overview

This case study looks at setting up a Joint Assessment process for young people in transition in West Berkshire.

Main transferable learning points

- Having a “shared” database is essential for positive joint working in transition
- The use of “lead professional” could be considered so that young people and their families know who they can ask for advice and support. This is particularly important if young people are not going to meet the criteria for adult services
- The development of a joint assessment process is tricky with a complexity of agencies involved. It is worth considering one plan with a range of assessments relevant to the needs of the young person
- Person centred planning needs to be at the heart of any assessment process for a holistic and positive transition
- When developing any new system ensure you have sign up from Director level

A description of West Berkshire

The population of West Berkshire is approximately 153,000. We have approximately 24,800 children and young people aged 0 to 19. 787 young people aged between 2 to 19 have statements and a further 2,200 are on School Action or School Action Plus. On average, 18 young people aged 18 transfers to adult social care each year.

Introduction to the case study

As we began to develop transition in West Berkshire and with the establishment of a multi agency Transition Forum, it became evident from both local experience and national research that professionals in children’s and adult’s services did not routinely and systematically share information on the needs of young people moving from one service to the other. Historically, situations had arisen where young people were due to leave residential education placements with little or no planning for their future.

Parents felt they had insufficient information on options and choices and because of the differing sets of criteria governing access to services, parents were subjected to a multiplicity of assessments, leaving them feeling that they had told their story over and over again. They said they find the process of assessing eligibility for services extremely negative, focussing on what the young person cannot do. After a lengthy period of stability for some young people who have attended the same special school, they have to face the

prospect of the unknown in terms of funding and access to services. Where they express a preference for a certain type of placement for their son or daughter, there is a period of uncertainty whilst assessments are carried out and eligibility is established. At this stage, several agencies are involved and families have to interact with a range of new professionals. They relinquish control, without knowing exactly who will be assuming it.

Duplication across teams existed; there are issues for young people with LAC (looked after children) status, and concerns over young people who do not meet the criteria for adult social care. There was also insufficient knowledge of the roles and responsibilities and statutory requirements for each agency.

The Transition Forum agreed that some of the National Transition Support Programme grant would be used for a project that would undertake a feasibility study to establish a Joint Assessment and process across children's and adult services, and eventually other partners.

Background

As described above, agencies and services had worked in comparative isolation. Not all schools produced Transition Plans and there was minimal consideration at reviews of a young person's needs post education. Issues such as housing, budgeting, travel etc were not discussed at Annual Reviews. Professionals conducting reviews had little knowledge themselves of services which existed outside of further education. Professionals from some agencies did not routinely attend or contribute towards Transition reviews, computer systems differ between agencies so information was exchanged in an ad hoc manner. Parents' anxiety around the future led them to believe that their child's needs could only be met in specialist establishments and there were concerns about equity and access.

Adult Services policy is 'Local services for Local People'. Without prior knowledge of the need, it was impossible for them to plan in time to meet needs locally.

Current severe cuts to adult service provision exacerbate the need for more thorough planning from an earlier age in order that young people and their families can prepare for their

adult life. In order for social inclusion to be achieved meaningfully, it needs to be planned for and supported.

Structural changes which resulted in the combining of the Special Educational Needs Team with the Disabled Children's Team substantially increased the capacity for sharing knowledge, expertise and a will to develop a system which would be of greater benefit to young people with Learning Disabilities.

To facilitate progress on the Joint Assessment project, a consultant from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities was commissioned. The strategic partners include the Young People's Learning Agency, Connexions, special schools, Partnerships and Joint Commissioning NHS Berkshire West, Adult Social Care, SEN and Disabled Children.

Aims and Objectives

What were we trying to achieve?

- The aim of the project was to consider the possibility of a more unified assessment and planning process for young people with additional needs, to move towards and ultimately reach an agreement across agencies and services which would incorporate a co-operative approach and a greater understanding of each others' functions, and ultimately, develop a unified action plan that all agencies can work towards.
- The benefits for the agencies would be the best possible use of resources, avoidance of duplication, legal responsibilities being met; evidence based strategic planning, people's expectations being managed and a system based on identifying the support required in order that a young person achieves maximum independence,
- The benefits to families should be a greater transparency about the system, an opportunity to plan for a personalised future with a greater awareness of the agencies which are likely to become involved, and fewer individual assessments which should

result in less stress and anxiety.

- The benefits to young people should be that the process is holistic and positive and puts their potential to achieve maximum independence at the heart of the process. It should encourage a 'can do' attitude rather than a deficit model which identifies lack of ability.

What benefits were/are we hoping for?

- To secure a commitment to further develop this work from senior managers in adult services, SEN and Disabled Children's Team and LAC (Looked After Children).
- To research and document a list of all possible assessments by each agency and the reason for them
- To map out pathways for young people who might meet the criteria for adult services and for those who do not.
- To establish a cross agency working group to look closely at specifics of individual assessments and begin to see if a joint assessment is feasible taking account of legal responsibilities of each agency
- To make meaningful links with other transition projects, i.e. to strengthen Person Centred Planning and to link aspiration to work experience
- To further support the operational work of the Virtual Transition Team.

What were/are our long term goals?

- To have a single assessment route approved at Corporate Director level so that it becomes normal practice
- To make the Transition Plan in school sufficiently comprehensive so that it can form the basis from which other assessments will be 'triggered'.
- To review data storage systems accessed

by individual agencies

- To review roles and responsibilities within teams and to develop the role of Lead Professional
- Transition Planning will be linked meaningfully to Self-Directed Support.
- To make transition a positive experience for families.
- Success in achieving these goals will be measured in changes and improvements in the current practice. So far, all Transition Plans, paperwork from reviews and statements have all been scanned onto the computer system used by the DC (Disabled Children's) Team for young people on their case load. This will be updated routinely.
- Additional training for facilitators in Person Centred Planning is being put into place.
- Training in facilitating communication with young people with severe communication problems has been put into place.
- Referral procedures, e.g. use of the CAF (Children and Families) assessment has been made clear to schools and training offered.
- More Personal Education Plan reviews for Looked After Children are being held alongside Transition reviews.
- Common areas from assessments by Disabled Children's Team are being shared with adult services.

Approach

Timescales and milestones

A consultant from the Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties was invited to a meeting with senior managers in SEN, DCT, CTPLD and Connexions based upon reports of work that the Foundation had done in Waltham Forest and Redbridge. The initial meeting was held on 4th March 2010.

As a result of the presentation, it was agreed that the work should be progressed.

- Agreed actions: A mapping exercise would be undertaken by the consultant of all the assessment forms.
- The consultant would have conversations with all relevant agencies.
- A feasibility report would be made to the group on 28th May 2010.
- The consultant would produce a schedule of work and further breakdown of costs.

It was agreed that the work would be paid for by part of the 2009/2010 NTSP Grant.

The first challenge was a severe delay due to the illness of the consultant. Further delays ensued until a consultant with experience of transition was able to pick up the project and continue with the development. Some momentum was lost during this period. The project was resumed in October 2010, with a revised schedule. A paper 'Reflections on the process and pathways in West Berkshire' was presented by the consultant to the Transition Forum in October 2010. The pathways described were for a young person with significant learning disabilities and healthcare needs and a similar young person who was LAC and attended a residential special school. Both were the subjects of a multiplicity of assessments and reviews which indicated significant duplication.

At the end of October, a "Think Tank" meeting of professionals was held to develop a shared vision, agree principles and an action plan. The Action Plan resulting from the "Think Tank" was issued by the consultant on 7th December 2010 and presented to the Transition Forum on February 8th 2010.

As a result of the "Think Tank", a smaller group of professionals from Disabled Children's Team, special schools, and the Transition Officer began work on March 11th on the Action Plan to:

- Build on the existing West Berkshire transition plan format so that it meets the needs of all agencies.
- Develop a transition pathway so that it's clear what needs to happen when and who

will be responsible.

- Create a common understanding about person-centred transition planning and reviews.
- Ensure that a pathway for Looked After young people is included and also a pathway for those young people who will not meet eligibility criteria for adult social care.
- Consider our combined resources for transition and changes that may be needed to support single assessment and planning during transition.
- Develop trust between professionals and agencies.
- Address data protection and consent issues.
- Create a common understanding of each other's responsibilities in relation to transition.
- Discuss, amend, agree and adopt the draft outcomes and principles.
- Seek support from the PCT (Primary Care Trust).
- Work with other Berkshire local authority areas and work out what needs to be done to develop a common approach.
- Develop a mechanism to link person-centred transition plans into strategic planning across our agencies.

Challenges

What problems did we encounter and how did we overcome/deal with them?

The delays encountered early on in the project affected the momentum. The initial requirement of the project given to the consultant was extremely simplistic which possibly led to the Transition Forum expecting faster progress. Once the project work started, it became evident that this work is multi layered and a great deal of preparatory research needed to be done. Any development would affect many agencies and require them to examine their processes which they may not be keen to do, as in isolation, they work perfectly well.

Processes which are almost parallel have evolved

in 'silos' to a certain extent and issues around this need to be approached sensitively. Due to the delays at the beginning, the work is now being carried out against the background of massive cuts to adult social care and seismic changes to the health service. This can have a stultifying effect. Nationally, the Learning for Living and Work document is being promoted which is being interpreted as a joint assessment tool, rather than an application for further education funding.

Because the nature of the work is cross agency, it is extremely difficult to arrange meetings to include all key professionals and it has been particularly difficult to engage health. When looking at the format for Transition Plans, non LA schools which have pupils from many different Local Authorities have their own format and are disinclined to adopt a recommendation from one LA. The young people at these schools are often among those with most complex needs.

The consultant presented to the "Think Tank" a wide range of documents which included:

- Pathway for young person likely to meet the criteria for funded support via Adult Social Care
- A Table and a Flowchart describing the above
- Implementing and resourcing the pathway
- The Young Person's Transition Plan
- The person centred transition planning and review process
- Here and now learning and care needs during the Transition process
- The transition coordinator role
- How assessment fits with transition planning
- Assessment and planning for transition checklist.

Descriptions of new roles and teams which would be necessary in order to implement not only a joint assessment and the supporting structures required, were presented to the group. People found it difficult to envisage a new structure because the full implications of

what joint assessment means were not appreciated at this stage. A certain 'entrenchment' in current practice made it difficult to appreciate the advantages of looking at a new model.

Once the implications had been appreciated, the members of the working group felt unable to progress the work at that stage because of the implications to services in terms of creating new roles (Lead Professional), and a new group (a Transition Team composed of education, children's, and adult social care, FE and health) sharing information and trusting other professionals and breaking down the current order.

The positive outcomes of the group meeting were:

- A recommendation from the Service Manager for SEN/DCT that a briefing paper should be prepared which would outline the benefits of joint assessment using the Lead Professional, Transition Team model in terms of time saved and duplication avoided, to include the numbers of cases of young people in transition who are likely to follow each pathway (those who are likely to meet Adult Services criteria, those who are likely to transition to FE, young people who are LAC, those who are vulnerable but don't meet criteria for adult social care). This would establish the likely case load for Lead Professionals from the various existing services. Some examples of the large numbers of professionals at Annual Reviews will be included to evidence the overlap and show how time can be saved if a Lead Professional assumes responsibility for a case. This paper will be taken to a Senior Management Team by the Service Manager for SEN and DCT for discussion.
- An agreement by both of the special schools to work together to produce a unified Communication Passport which could accompany a Transition Plan.
- Problems which still need to be overcome:
 - The disinclination to give a predictive

budget at an earlier age

- Lack of capacity of adult services to take a young person on their case load until they reach 18
- Uncertainty regarding Connexions
- 'Selling' the notion of sharing cases via a Lead Professional so the 'steer' might come from a care perspective rather than an education perspective for instance
- Frequency of meetings of a Transition Panel required to discuss cases and, which other meetings within the structure this would replace.
- Questions of governance, responsibility etc.

➤ Advantages

- Willingness of the Service Manager to seek Pathfinder status for piloting Personal Budgets with young people in transition which might attract funding from government.
- Good progress on Person Centred planning which has persuaded special schools of the advantages of holistic planning for young people and a willingness to develop a Transition Plan which is fit for purpose. Also, their agreement to develop Communication Passports.
- School's and parent's requirement to have a central person (Lead Professional) to convene meetings and take the lead on challenging cases which will avoid frustration and time wasting.
- The data base and Virtual Transition Team which is already used to discuss young people in transition which could be 'converted' into a meeting where pathways for young people are identified and thus the Lead Professional. More likelihood of creative solutions.
- Better use of resources. Fewer

professionals travelling to attend reviews.

Successes

Key achievements to date

- Prior to this project, and separate from it, a data base of all young people with a statement of SEN aged between 14 and 19, which contains comprehensive details of the services received, services anticipated, agencies involved, predicted destinations, and costs of the current placement has been set up.
- A Virtual Transition Team attended by children's and adult services, Connexions, the special schools, the local FE college has been established where this data base forms the basis of discussion of cases
- The appointment of an independent consultant to work across agencies, bring key professionals together to test the feasibility of a joint assessment format.
- Since the work on joint assessment has begun, Person Centred Planning in schools has taken on greater significance. A further external impetus to this work is the adoption of Direct Payments for all children's social care cases and the move towards self directed support for adults eligible for social care.

Lessons learned and conclusion?

As the work unfolded, it became increasingly evident that the development of joint assessment is extremely complex and in order to be successful, it would affect the working practices of a wide range of agencies. Because so much has to be considered, it was quite difficult to find a starting point for consideration of the papers presented to the working group. Although it was considered that 'sign up' of the major agencies involved (education, DCT, Connexions and adult services) was essential, it was difficult to get them to engage with the process of development.

An alternative method might have been to see how a recommended model could be incorporated into our practice. Some research on resources currently employed might have been a useful starting point. The thinking around the

development so far would not have happened without the consultant leading the work and will result in members of the working group having greater ownership rather than having a model submitted for consideration.

In spite of the fact that the Learning for Living and Work document might become statutory, the work around the development of joint assessment has been a very useful exercise and if the model is accepted at Director level, West Berks will be perfectly placed to implement it. The work will also make the implementation of personal budgets for young people in transition easier.

This work is directly in line with recommendations of the Green Paper on SEN which states that young people should have a single statutory assessment process and 'Education, Health and Care Plan' from birth by 2014. West Berks will have the structures and processes in place in advance of this date if the joint assessment model presented by the consultant from the FPLD is adopted.

Future plans

- Both special schools to work together on producing a comprehensive communication passport for each young person which will form the central information on which to assess whether or not young people are likely to meet the criteria for services from Disabled Children's Team and Adult Service Team. Depending on which 'pathway' a young person is likely to follow, the Lead Professional will be identified.
- Development of the Lead Professional role
- Agreement from Director of Children's Service to apply for 'Pathfinder' status

"How to...." Guide

Key issues and principles

- Secure agreement to the principles of changing to a system of joint assessment at Director level
- Research legal requirements of each agency

and plot pathways for groups of young people either likely or not likely to meet criteria for services

- Work closely with schools so they have commitment to the principles of joint assessment
- Ensure Person Centred Planning is embedded thoroughly in schools

Barriers

'Silo' attitudes in individual services

Lack of willingness to openly discuss budget implications of decisions on out of authority placements

Current cut off points between children's and adults services exacerbated by cuts in adult services

Professional protectiveness

How to turn it into good practice

The principles must be adopted by all agencies involved. In order to drive the practice forward, agreement should be secured at Director level. Statistics on current use of resources and how savings can be made whilst providing a more holistic and satisfactory service to young people and their families need to be produced in order to make a clear case. Schools need to be involved and have a clear understanding of their role in the process and see themselves as a contributor to a young person's whole life experience.

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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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