

# national transition support team

working together to improve transition  
for disabled young people

## Case Study: West Berkshire Council (Multi agency working and joint assessments)

### Introduction

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### Overview

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### Main transferable learning points

- Multi agency senior management sign up is crucial if progress is to be made.
- Good information sharing and tracking systems enable LAs to monitor the quality of transition and outcomes for disabled young people.
- All different elements of a transition process (strategic planning meeting, policy and protocols, person centred planning and assessments, information and advice to young people and families) must be brought together to ensure a coordinated approach to improving services.

### Introduction

The Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) programme, launched in 2007, recognised a need for a dedicated focus nationally on transition to adulthood for disabled young people. Parents, carers and young people were reporting very variable experiences of transition, with some expressing concerns about lack of opportunities, difficulty accessing support and in some cases agencies not working effectively together and not sharing information.

The Transition Support Programme was set up as part of AHDC to improve the situation nationally and help disabled young people to reach their potential, lead fulfilling lives and become economically active wherever possible.

Jane Seymour, Service Manager for the SEN and Disabled Children's Team at West Berkshire Council said, "It was great to have our work recognised. The grant (from the Transition Support Programme) enabled us to give an even greater focus to transition for young people with disabilities and to move forward with some really exciting initiatives which would not have been possible without the extra funding. We were also able to work with our TSP Named Adviser to agree a development plan and decide exactly how the funding would be used to get better outcomes for young people."

West Berkshire County Council has been at the forefront of improving transition to adulthood for young people with disabilities. The need to improve transition arrangements for this vulnerable group of young people was identified

by West Berkshire in 2006 when targets on transition were included in the Council's Local Area Agreement with the Government and a Transition Officer, Wendy Sturgess, was appointed to the SEN and Disabled Children's Team.

## **Transition Forum**

West Berkshire Council set up a Multi Agency Transition Forum in 2007 to bring together all the key agencies involved in transition, get people talking about how joint working could be improved and develop a common vision. Key desired outcomes for West Berkshire were very clear. It was agreed that disabled young people should have access to high quality, appropriate further education and to employment wherever possible, with support as required, so that they have the opportunity to be economically active.

Disabled young people should be able to have fulfilling social lives, relationships and the chance to be active members of their communities. They should be able to live independently wherever possible, with support to do so if required. In short, disabled young people should be able to expect everything other young people can expect as they move into adulthood.

A wide range of agencies is involved in the Forum, including Children's Services, special and mainstream schools, Adult Social Care Services, Housing, the Primary Care Trust, the Youth Service, MENCAP, Connexions, local FE Colleges and the Learning and Skills Council. Parents have also been very active members of the Forum.

The Transition Forum has gone from strength to strength, setting strategy for transition, overseeing implementation of the strategy, monitoring compliance with the protocol and evaluating outcomes for young people.

## **Transition Protocol**

One of the first tasks the Forum set itself was to produce a Transition Protocol, setting out clearly the role of each agency in transition, stating exactly what each agency would do,

when and what standards of service delivery they would meet. The protocol included procedures for joint working and handover of cases and information sharing between agencies. It was agreed and signed up to at Director level so that all agencies gave a commitment to fulfilling their part of the agreement and could be held accountable.

Wendy Sturgess, Transition Officer in the SEN and Disabled Children's Team in West Berkshire Council, describes this Protocol as a 'watershed'. She explains, "To make the Protocol work we needed to set aside our differing agendas and look at what we could achieve by working more effectively together. When we started the discussion we very quickly found there was a huge level of commitment to make transition better for disabled young people".

## **The Transition Database and Virtual Transition Team**

One of the key aims of the Transition Protocol was to ensure that information is shared between agencies so that good quality, timely transition planning takes place and agencies which need to be involved in providing support get involved at the appropriate times.

A detailed transition database was set up of children going through transition, from Year 8 upwards. It includes the type of SEN or disability the child has, school attended, educational attainments, agencies involved, health needs, cost of current provision, whether a Transition Plan has been completed/updated, likely destination, services which may need to support as well as the final actual destination. All agencies involved with the young person contribute data so that there is an overview of the young person's needs and progress through the transition process can be tracked.

To take this a step further, it was then decided to set up a "Virtual Transition Team" consisting of staff from the SEN and Disabled Children's Team, the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities, the Adult Social Care teams for people with sensory and physical disabilities, the Community Mental Health Service, the Connexions Service and Newbury

College. The Virtual Transition Team meets twice per term and undertakes a detailed review of the database, checking that cases are progressing appropriately, making sure that agencies which might need to offer support are alerted and dealing with any problematic issues. The database therefore assists agencies with their planning for individual young people, facilitates joint working and also assists with strategic and financial planning.

### **Developing local services**

West Berkshire Council has worked very closely with Newbury College to identify future needs and develop appropriate courses for young people coming up to transition. A gap which was identified was a suitable local FE college course for young people with very profound and complex disabilities, the Connect Course.

The College, the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities and the Housing Department worked closely together to ensure that suitable housing in the local area would be available for the group of young people for whom the course was designed. This joint initiative enabled young people with very complex needs to live and access education within their local community. The course is in its third year now and discussions are taking place with the College about further courses which could be developed.

This work has been supported by the Learning and Skills Council's Action for Inclusion initiative, which aims to build capacity within the local FE sector for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Jane Seymour, Service Manager, said, "We were very fortunate in that Kate Brennan from Newbury College was also a regional facilitator on the Action for Inclusion programme and was really keen to work with us to develop local courses for our young people. It has been a really effective partnership which continues to grow and develop".

### **Information for parents, carers and young people**

Early consultation with parents and carers identified a need for better information on transition as a key concern. A new leaflet for parents and carers was produced, explaining the transition process, what to expect at a Transition Review, and giving details of the agencies which might become involved at transition. This was approved by the Transition Forum and has been put on the Council's website. In addition, a few members of the Transition Forum got together to develop a DVD for parents and young people with disabilities called "From Fourteen to the Future". This was funded by the Learning Disability Partnership and has been extremely well received by parents.

### **Designated Youth Worker for Young People with SEN/ Disabilities**

This initiative has been funded by the Transition Support Programme. A dedicated youth worker was appointed in 2009 to work with young people with SEN/disabilities in West Berkshire who are going through transition. The youth worker is tasked with auditing social and recreational opportunities for young people with disabilities aged 14 and above, finding out what other activities young people want and working with providers to develop new opportunities and activities where appropriate.

The Transition Forum decided to make this a priority for use of the Transition Support Programme funding so that young people should be able to access a wide range of activities outside school so that they can make new friends, grow in self confidence, learn new skills and just be able to chill out and have fun!

### **Person Centred Transition Reviews**

Another project which West Berkshire Council has been able to take forward as a result of funding through the Transition Support Programme is the piloting of Person Centred Transition Reviews in four of its schools: two

special schools and two mainstream schools. Person centred planning puts the young person and their family very much at the centre of the planning process and asks 'what does the young person want and need', and 'how can that be made possible', rather than trying to simply fit the young person into existing services. It empowers the young person and their family to take a very active and equal role in the planning process, making sure that their views and wishes are known. The person centred model for reviews is well embedded in some schools nationally and not used at all in others. Support from the Transition Support Programme has enabled West Berkshire to second a senior teacher from one of its schools, Karen McQuillan from The Castle Special School, to lead on the introduction of person centred planning in West Berkshire.

### Joint Assessment / A Single Plan

One of the messages coming from parents when West Berkshire undertook consultation about transition was that they get fed up of having to tell their story several times over to different agencies. Nationally there are currently many assessments which might be carried out on a young person going through transition by different agencies and several separate plans which might be produced to fulfil the statutory requirements of each agency. Not surprisingly, this can feel very disjointed and confusing for families and young people and can lead to duplication.

West Berkshire Council decided, with agreement from the Transition Support Programme, to use some of its funding to fund a piece of work on developing a joint assessment process which could lead to a single, holistic plan. This work is in the relatively early stages and would need sign up from all the agencies involved, but a promising start has been made. When West Berkshire Council did its annual consultation with parents and carers about transition in November 2009, parents said again they wanted the achievement of a single joint plan at transition to be a key aspiration.



### A Parent's View

Graham is 17 years old and has a severe speech and language condition (Aural Dyspraxia). He also has an expressive language disorder. He has been in residential school since he was five years old. He doesn't fit into any traditional disability category and has a very high IQ. Graham's mother, who is a member of West Berkshire's Transition Forum, said:

*"Aiming High [for Disabled Children] has made a huge difference to our lives and that of my son Graham. We have been very impressed with the professional way officers and clinicians across West Berkshire have supported us. They have all recognised that my son does not fit into any specific category and are all working to ensure the right services are in place for when he reaches adulthood. In the past different agencies have kept information from each other but that is not the case now. There is a desire to ensure information is shared globally and people have worked hard to recognise barriers and have wanted to break them down. The person centred transition planning hasn't tried to fit my son into a category. It has enabled people to look at his needs and look at how services can be fitted around Graham and how he can best be helped to actively contribute in society."*

### Acknowledgements

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### National Transition Support Team

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](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc)

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