

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: City of York Council (Post 16 opportunities)

Introduction

This case study describes how City of York Council set up an Opportunities Fair to provide better information about what disabled young people could do after leaving school.

Overview

An annual Opportunities Fair attracting over 200 people aims to give disabled young people and their families in York a head start in deciding their future. Personalised specialist advice sessions and workshop taster activities are among the features of the Fair, funded by Connexions and the York Valuing People Partnership Board. The event was initiated when young people and their parents said they needed more information about their options on leaving school. The Fair enables employers and colleges to talk with families about their needs, and informs proactive planning for appropriate courses, jobs and work placements for disabled young people.

Main transferable learning points

- An Opportunities Fair is a good way of bringing together service users and providers.
- Practical workshops enable young people to gain hands-on experience which helps inform decisions about their future education, training and employment.
- Inviting a wide range of professionals, businesses and providers stimulates networking.
- Parents and young people can attend in the early stages of transition so they are well informed by the time they come to make future plans and decisions.

Introduction

A group of people from different services and sectors in York came together to work out how to provide better information about what disabled young people could do after leaving school. Disabled young people, their parents, voluntary groups, representatives from further and higher education, business and council personnel were included in a planning group for an annual Opportunities Fair.

Background

The Opportunities Fair is just one development in a range of improvements to services for disabled young people in York. In 2008 Ofsted and the Audit Commission judged the City Council's services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as outstanding.

The authority has a strong record of multi-agency working. Its Strategic Partnership for Integrating Services for Disabled Children represents all organisations working with disabled children in the city of York. This includes colleagues from the Local Authority and Health as well as parents and colleagues from third sector organisations. The authority has also established a multi agency Transition Team which includes children's and adult social workers, Connexions/IAG advisers, community nurses, therapists, educational psychologists, LA SEN staff and staff from York's Independent Living Travel Skills project.

National drivers such as the Aiming High for Disabled Children's Core Offer and the Every Disabled Child Matters LA Charter, to which the

City of York Council has signed up, provided the wider context for consultations in which parents and disabled young people were asked what they wanted from their services. As a result, a parent forum, CANDI, was set up to involve parents in the planning and commissioning of services for disabled children. There are now parent representatives on eleven of the strategic and working multi-agency groups within Learning Culture and Children's Services. Parents have had input to the commissioning of a range of services including transition planning.

The Opportunities Fair came as a direct result of consultation with families in transition. In 2007 research with disabled young people and their families revealed that they needed more information about what they could do when they left school and that it would be more helpful to have this information earlier. Young people with additional needs and impairments often find it difficult to get jobs, find the right college courses and gain work experience. The Fair, therefore, aimed to give information and advice about what was available, as well as inspiring visitors with what older young people had already done.

As well as the establishment of an annual event (the second Fair was held in April 2010), other improvements and innovations affecting transition in York include:

- extending the lead practitioner role to support young people through transition
- learning from a new transitions pathway piloted at a local special school is being extended to mainstream schools
- a youth club for disabled young people financed by four different funders
- mentoring opportunities.

Aims and objectives

The aims of the Fair were to

- Share information with disabled young people and their families about what they could do when they leave school.
- Provide information about the transition process and the multi agency Transition Team in York.

- Enable young people to experience what it might be like to pursue different options after school, through workshops.
- Provide an enjoyable day for disabled young people where they learn with someone different from their usual teachers.
- Develop links with colleges in the region and make parents feel more informed and confident when considering future placements.
- Help employers, who were invited, to showcase good practice of including disabled young people but also to increase their understanding of the benefits of employing disabled young people.
- Enable more employers and colleges to talk with families about their needs, to inform proactive planning for appropriate courses, jobs and work placements for disabled young people.

Approach

All local secondary schools were invited to take part in the Opportunities Fair, which was funded by Connexions and the York Valuing People Partnership Board. The Fair was open to all young people aged 14-19 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or on School Action Plus, as well as older young people with learning difficulties or disabilities and their parent/carers. Over 240 people attended, many taking advantage of personalised specialist advice sessions. Young disabled participants received one to one advice, face to face contact with providers, and workshop taster activities designed to raise their aspirations and support them in making decisions about their future.

The Fair included exhibitors from education providers including colleges, from the Transition Team and other LA services, health, business, benefits, voluntary groups and a disabled young man who runs his own business through an individual budget. A range of practical workshops, planned in response to requests from young people, included bricklaying, beauty therapies, horticulture, art, bar work and catering. These gave young people concrete experience from which to be able to make

future decisions. For those young people who had more complex needs, the hands on experience was a chance for their parents and teachers to observe them in a different setting and see their potential and engagement with the subject matter.

A parent of a disabled young man, who also works as an educational research consultant, was asked to evaluate the Fair. She created accessible forms for people of different abilities and interests and collated this information in a report. She also talked to some people at the Fair and made observations during the day by taking photographs of activities chosen. Students from the local further education college were engaged in two ways. Some students made a DVD recording of the day and shared this with all the schools so that any young people who were not able to come could see what was available. Others provided support on the day for students who needed help finding workshops or support to find and understand information from the market place.

One young person said last year:

"I visited all sorts of stands and found out about organisations I never knew existed. The information was given clear as crystal and I learned a lot of things."

Challenges

The main challenge to running the Fair has been ensuring that everyone gets to hear about it. Although the Fair was hugely successful in its first year with over 240 people attending, organisers still felt that they did not reach everyone who needed to know. Despite trying a wide range of providing information, some still miss it.

Organisers are also trying to ensure the information is accessible and relevant and are working with a project officer from the parent forum to do that. Services are working to improve their information leaflets and make them more accessible. The leaflets are being gathered to be placed in key central places, such as libraries, children's centres and schools.

Successes

There was considerable feedback indicating that the Fair had been successful in providing information for families and young people. Networking between professionals had increased understanding of cohorts of young people and improved communication and multi agency working. People also gave useful feedback on how to improve the Fair next time. There were a lot of comments that said 'well done' and 'please do this again' and this showed that young people had enjoyed themselves. Letters from students written after the day gave very positive feedback.

Young people were delighted to have met a number of people they had not seen for some time including friends and teachers and other professionals. They found out information that they didn't know about before. They had fun trying out new activities with different adults and young people from other schools. Their parents and teachers could watch them doing these things and staff reported that they were able to make valuable assessments of students and that in a few cases this had made them revise their own expectations of what students can do.

One parent said:

"It has given everyone a chance to see what disabled young people can do, including the young people themselves. We need to continue to encourage the enthusiasm and develop ways in which we recognise the value of every single young person in York."

Increased contact between professionals has been made following the Opportunities Fair. Having "put a face to a name", professionals now find it easier to have informal conversations, which promote multi agency working.

Conclusion

An independent research consultant evaluated the Opportunities Fair and their report was fed back to strategic multi agency partnerships. Young people and families reported an increased understanding of the options available to them. Professionals reported that the increased networking had improved their multi agency working and knowledge of options to

share with other families. The DVD allowed the LA to share this experience with other students who had not been able to attend the fair.

Practical ideas

- Begin by consulting with disabled young people and their families, to find out what they want.
- Involve disabled young people, their families and a wide range of professionals and organisations in shaping the event.
- Check information for relevance and accessibility.
- Provide practical workshops so young people gain hands-on experience.
- Record the event with photographs and DVDs to show students who are unable to attend what was available.
- Use students to support the event e.g. taking photographs, providing information, signposting etc.

Key policy and legislation

Council services for disabled children and their families have in part been driven by national policies including the Core Offer issued under the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme. The Core Offer sets out a national statement of expectations for how disabled children and their families will be informed and involved as their needs are assessed and the necessary services are delivered.

The Core Offer covers:

- Information
- Transparency
- Assessment
- Participation
- Feedback.

At the same time the Council signed up to the Every Disabled Child Matters LA Charter which committed it to developing services for disabled children and their families. It is based around nine promises covering a range of issues. These include: involvement in planning and decision making, access to more places and activities, a wider range of short breaks, and better support in the transition into adulthood. York Council has also developed their own Charter and the Promise booklet which sets out their commitment to disabled children, young people and their families.

Every Disabled Child Matters

Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) is the campaign to get rights and justice for every disabled child. EDCM wants to see every Local Authority and Primary Care Trust (PCT) make a clear commitment to improve services for disabled children and their families.

Download the Local Authority and PCT Charters:

www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/charters.aspx

Statutory framework: the national context

The white paper **Valuing People** set out the Government's vision for people with a learning disability, across a range of services based on four key principles of rights, independence, choice, and inclusion. The white paper's vision covered a range of issues including health, housing and employment.

Department of Health (2001)

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk

National service framework for children, young people and maternity services

Department of Health (2004)

Standard 4: Growing up into adulthood.

Standard 8: Disabled children and young people and those with complex needs.

Standard 9: Promoting the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people.

www.dh.gov.uk

Transition: getting it right for young

people: Improving the transition of young people with long term conditions from children's to adult health services.

Department of Health (2006)

www.dh.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Act 2000 Section 139A

Local authorities now responsible for ensuring learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are assessed in their final year of compulsory schooling.

Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learners Act 2009

Funding responsibility for the funding and organisation of 16-19 education and training transferred to local authorities from the LSC. Includes the responsibility for LLDD up to the age of 25 and is supported by the Young People's Learning Agency for England (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

A Transition Guide for All Services

This guide brings together all key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people. It includes information on statutory duties and offers examples of effective practice to illustrate how services are addressing local need. Written by the Council for Disabled Children. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007)

www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk/resources/guidance.aspx

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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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