

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Oldham Borough Council (housing)

Introduction

This case study describes two different schemes which are helping disabled young people in Oldham to achieve their goals of having their own home, accessing mainstream facilities and living in the community with varying levels of support.

Overview

A strong culture of multi-agency working and person centred planning is driving housing solutions for disabled young people in Oldham MBC. This case study describes two different schemes which are helping disabled young people to achieve their goals of having their own home, accessing mainstream facilities and living in the community with varying levels of support. The first scheme involves a small number of young people with complex needs moving back to Oldham from out of borough placements; the second scheme shows how vulnerable young people, who often need only a limited amount of help, can be supported to maintain their tenancies and help each other while taking a full part in their local communities.

Main transferable learning points

Different housing solutions are needed for different young people, but disabled young people can live successfully in many different kinds of housing and can cope with a full range of tenures, including owning their own homes.

Housing has to be a central part of person centred transition planning as disabled young people increasingly aspire to setting up their own home.

Planning ahead with young people at the centre of the process is generally more cost effective than managing housing needs when they arise out of a crisis or are unplanned.

Housing can be the first step to enabling disabled young people to access mainstream facilities as well as becoming part of the wider community.

Introduction

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council uses different approaches to support young disabled people live independently of their parents and carers. Moving disabled young people who may require 24 hour supported accommodation from out of borough placements, often into new homes in the borough, is one approach which brings young people back into their own home community and results in substantial savings. Oldham takes a multi-agency approach to planning and making provision for successful moves.

At the same time the Council has adopted a national scheme aimed at supporting vulnerable people with learning disabilities in their own homes. These are people who are often not immediately eligible for social care. Around 150 disabled people in Oldham, among them young people in their 20s, are benefiting from the KeyRing scheme. KeyRing is a voluntary organisation which promotes a model of community supported living that offers an alternative to residential homes for people with learning disabilities. KeyRing encourages vulnerable people to live and work as a community, supporting each other by sharing their skills and talents.

Background

Nationally there is evidence that disabled young people would like the opportunity to live more independently. For example, research by the National Autistic Society in 2001 showed that

- nearly 50% of adults with autism spectrum disorders were living at home, and only 54% of more able adults were happy with where they lived.
- 35% of families were not happy with the housing element of post-14 transition planning.

In many areas transition can mean an abrupt move from children's services to adult accommodation. Disabled care leavers, often those with learning difficulties, can fall through the gap between mainstream services and disability services. So those young people who need only moderate support may be left to manage without it and are offered few options between this and a place in a residential institution. At the other end of the scale, young people with 'multiple' impairments, especially those with communication impairments, are more likely to move into residential care when they leave children's services.

At local level in Oldham there is evidence of housing need among disabled young adults. For example, the highest numbers of LA housing applicants stating serious illness or disability come from the younger groups particularly those aged 35 or less (Oldham Housing Needs and Demands study - revised 2008). The council tries to meet housing need by taking 20% of properties on new estates. These are in the main for general lets to people on the council list but as disabled young people move back into Oldham from out of borough placements and have nowhere to live, their housing need becomes top priority.

Drivers for change

The desire to eventually have a place of their own is one of the common aspirations to come out of transition review planning with young people with statements of special educational need.

Aims and objectives

- to provide the right level of housing and living support for disabled people with learning difficulties who have the potential to live independently
- to avoid crisis management where vulnerable young people receive help only when they get into difficulties
- to place disabled young people from Oldham in well supported housing as they return from out of borough placements
- to reduce expensive out of borough placements often the result of a lack of planning
- to build capacity in local communities, in supportive networks, and in individuals themselves so that they could take a full part in their communities and live more independent lives.

Approach

1. Returning to Oldham

Those young people moving from foster care or other residential placements out of borough receive multi-agency support built around them and their families. Person centred planning helps them take the next steps whether into education or employment and addresses their wider, often complex, needs such as those related to health and communication. Adult and Children's Services in Oldham are part of a multi-agency network, though it often depends on individuals within the network to pull different services together to ensure young people have co-ordinated support.

How benefits and support are managed is important so those young people with capabilities to carry out a job have an incentive to work. In the case of two school friends moving into a new house together, low rents mean they have the real possibility of doing some work and that they will benefit financially. The young men pay rent and bills for their room, covered by housing benefit, while other costs for communal areas and services are paid

through a service charge.

Legal issues have to be arranged too with interim tenancies established for young people under 18. Social workers may have to apply for deputyship at court in cases where the young people do not have capacity. This gives the LA right to sign tenancies.

Socially, the new arrangements mean that tenancies can be arranged round pairs or groups of school friends. In the past young people may have had to slot in with a much older person because they were seen as adults and had to fill an available vacancy, rather than have accommodation organised around their distinct needs as young people in transition.

2. The KeyRing scheme

In 2000 Oldham Council saw the potential for the KeyRing scheme because it offered a way of supporting certain groups of disabled people in an inclusive, cost effective and sustainable way. In particular, it was seen as both supportive and preventative for groups of people not immediately eligible for social care, but who might need it without intervention of this sort, for example, people with learning difficulties and medium to low levels of mental health need. The KeyRing scheme was tried and tested: it had initially been set up to support people with learning difficulties who were leaving long stay hospitals and who did not need 24 hour supported accommodation.

According to the Government programme, *Valuing People (How to estimate the numbers of People with a Learning Disability in your area, see Valuing People website)*, historically those people with mild/moderate learning disabilities have received very few services, including housing support. The largest group of people with a learning disability may be mostly unknown to Social Services until they hit a crisis such as problems with debt, court proceedings to evict them or homelessness.

Community building is at the heart of KeyRing's approach: their support is based on people living in their own homes but sharing their skills and talents with each other and with their communities.

In 2000 the Council asked KeyRing to begin a small number of pilot projects. As a result of the success of those first pilots, the scheme was expanded in the borough so that now 16 networks operate across Oldham.

The scheme works by linking together up to nine people living either in LA or housing association tenancies, or sometimes their own homes. The selection process is important and people are interviewed before joining the scheme to find out what they can offer to others in the network e.g. one young man with Asperger's syndrome was feeling quite isolated because of his condition and was able to benefit from greater social contact by joining the scheme but, as a relatively able member, could offer a number of skills of benefit to others in his network.

A community living volunteer works with each network and sees members regularly, helping them work together and socialise. It is important that they live near to each other for this reason. The volunteer is a local person – possibly a student or trainee social care worker – who acts like a good neighbour, helping out if difficulties arise. As well as supporting members with independent living skills such as budgeting, meal preparation and paying bills, they will help them access mainstream parts of the community by linking them up for a trip to the cinema or swimming pool, for example.

An area manager employed by KeyRing oversees groups of four to five networks and works closely with the council's adult services which makes sure cases are monitored and extra support is provided where needed. There is a transparent link between LA managers, operational managers within KeyRing and community support.

The cost of the scheme works out at around £50 per member each week. Funding has come from different sources with Supporting People funding a certain number of tenancies and individuals using their Individual Budgets (IBs) to purchase services.

Challenges

Effecting a change of culture within all the council's services has been difficult. Some of the changes have been controversial and services can still take a narrow view of their role.

Multi-agency working is not easy when different parts of the local authority are working to different legislation and each has to understand legislation affecting the other. Children's Services, for example, may have to grapple with housing legislation for the first time; while Adult Services have to understand that child protection legislation affects the process. Health services have also had to adjust to taking on responsibilities for young people moving back into Oldham and social workers have to work out which service is responsible for certain elements of health care such as provision of equipment.

The Children's Rights Service has provided useful support over power of attorney and appointee issues and where different legislative regimes need unpicking.

Multi-agency sign up has been a necessary pre-requisite for the development of the KeyRing scheme too. Although there are now 16 networks operating within Oldham, development has been slow because of the complexity of setting up each network. However the time taken has been seen to be worthwhile as the existing networks are judged to be sustainable and provide an inclusive and low cost solution to supporting groups of disabled people who might in the past have been placed in expensive residential care or only offered support once they hit a crisis.

There has been some difficulty capturing the imagination of other service user groups. While the scheme was designed for people with learning difficulties, its champions believe it could be opened up to include those with other needs, in particular users of mental health services and statutory after care services.

Successes

Successful multi-agency support for transition planning is helping to change an expensive and unsatisfactory fire fighting culture for those young people moving back into Oldham from out of borough placements. In particular Adult Services' earlier involvement with transition is helping prevent crisis management where expensive residential solutions have to be made in haste. For example, two young women with autism, who will be leaving school in 12 months, have already chosen a plot for their new home which is part of a new estate and which they will move into when they leave school and move back into Oldham.

Oldham's lack of in-borough residential provision for under-18s has had expensive consequences in the past. So far, joint planning has resulted in six young people on course to move back in borough at a saving of up to £200,000 each. Four of the young people are moving into newly built homes at the same time as their neighbours – a mixture of tenants and owner occupiers. Being there at the start means the young people have a greater chance of becoming part of a new community. At the same time, person centred planning has highlighted the need to maintain ties and continuity associated with their former homes. In one case this has meant ensuring that a much loved Saturday job at a local football ground is maintained for one young man.

KeyRing scheme successes:

- Parents and carers of network members can have a more adult relationship with their son or daughter, reassured that they are well supported by their network of friends and strengthening community connections.
- Many network members are able to become full citizens of their neighbourhood, enjoying increased social contact and becoming less reliant on paid support.
- KeyRing's model of support and strong focus on community helps local authorities to meet many of their Local Area Agreement targets.

Conclusion

Getting housing right is just one element in successful transition of disabled young people. Transition planning is at the heart of both schemes which aim to help disabled young people achieve their aspirations of living in their local communities and accessing mainstream facilities. In both examples, planning has helped services avoid expensive crisis management, either by needing to place young people out of borough or by having to pick up the pieces when those living independently hit problems.

Over 150 members of KeyRing networks across Oldham are now receiving the practical help they need in budgeting and maintaining their tenancies. They are also able to enjoy greater social contact and taking part in the wider community.

While there may be scope to extend the KeyRing model to other groups, the Council believes that it has probably reached its optimum number in terms of provision for those with learning disabilities within the borough. The aim now is to ensure that all service users and particularly young people in transition are accessing different types of tenure.

What makes planning ahead for housing good practice?

Establishing disabled young people in their own homes is the first stage in helping them access mainstream facilities and feel part of the wider community. By bringing them back in borough to live they are able to maintain relationships with their families and make local friends.

Success depends on:

- Person centred transition planning
- Effective multi-agency working
- Good co-ordination of all the services, legal procedures and benefits system.

What makes KeyRing good practice?

The KeyRing scheme is a model of inclusive, community supported living for people with learning disabilities. Key issues include:

- An understanding of how to build communities within the wider locality
- Providing volunteer support to help with independent living skills such as budgeting
- Monitoring members to identify extra support needs
- Ensuring that management is transparent and responsive.

Practical ideas for improving housing options for young people

- make sure housing is considered at transition review meetings and discussed in PSHE at school and college
- consider housing within the context of the young person's aspirations for employment and education, their friendships, and leisure
- Establish effective multi-agency working through good communication
- For young people with complex needs, ensure a co-ordinator is progress chasing and checking that everybody is taking ownership of their own area
- Build on good work and positives in each young person's life, in employment, education and leisure activities
- Organise benefits effectively
- Recruit disabled people to KeyRing networks who have compatible skills so that someone with social skills who needs practical support with writing and working out budgets, for example, is matched with members who may need

social contact but who are numerate or good at form filling and writing letters

- Recruit Key Ring members who live near each other so that the community living volunteer can link them together and with the community
- Recruit volunteers to support KeyRing networks from the local community – their local knowledge will help to increase members' contact with those in their neighbourhood.

Key legislation

The Children Act, 1989

Local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation for children 'in need' who reach the age of 16 and whose welfare remains a concern.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

Social Services must prepare a pathway plan, which should look at the young person's need for support and assistance including their needs for accommodation. The Act requires that 16 to 17 year old relevant children are provided with or maintained in suitable accommodation with support where the Local Authority considers this is necessary.

Policy

The white paper **Valuing People** (2001) 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.

Valuing People Now

Valuing People Now is a three year strategy launched in January 2009. It aims to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities, and the lives of their families and carers. Housing is one of the six areas it is working on. The Government wants more people with learning disabilities and their carers to have a greater choice and control over where and how they live.

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk

Supporting People

The Supporting People programme requires local authorities to plan and buy housing support. It was set up to improve support to vulnerable people, including people with learning disabilities, who wish to live as independently as possible. The programme provides funding to support people in tenancies.

www.spkweb.org.uk

Organisations and resources

Housing Options are a housing advisory service for people with learning disabilities. Their website includes guides and frequently asked questions explaining many aspects of the choices available to people, including capacity in relation to contracts, different kinds of home ownership etc.

www.housingoptions.org.uk/

The **Independent Living Fund** is designed to help disabled people to live independently in the community rather than in residential care. They can use payments from the fund to employ people to provide personal and domestic care in their home.

www.ilf.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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