

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Sunfield School Transition Case Study

Three years ago Sunfield School employed a Transitions Solutions Adviser to spend three years looking at the Transition process in the school, and to look at ways of improving it. Prior to this post being created Sunfield had conducted some research into the outcomes for the young people leaving the school, and found that a large number of placements broke down in a short space of time, and that for some young people multiple placement breakdowns had resulted in them being sectioned under the Mental Health Act. The school were keen to support young people further, to ensure that appropriate placements were found for young people, and that these provisions were equipped for dealing with the challenges that the young people present.

Jan Millward was employed as the Transitions Solution Adviser, and works under the umbrella of the Family Services. Her initial remit was to research into the outcomes for young people leaving the school over 3 years, however it quickly became apparent that there were some changes that could be made, in order to quickly change the outcomes for young people.

Sunfield School is a residential special school for young people with severe and complex learning needs and behaviours that challenge. The school has a very strong ethos of involving families in the care and support of the children and young people. The school works hard to empower families and provides a high level of support and training. When children start at the school their parents are linked to the parents of a child who is already at the school, to offer advice and support. The school also provides training for families on specific areas, and has days for Mums, Dads and significant others. The school aims to empower parents at an early stage, and to give them skills and knowledge to support their child in the future.

The school also have a sibling support group. Siblings are sent a pack about the school, to involve them at an early stage. The Family Support Team holds a minimum of three events a year, including a summer camping trip. The group provides links with other siblings, and gives them the chance to talk about their experiences. Siblings are always invited to complete a form to provide information in a young person's review, and may be invited to attend. Siblings are also asked to input into the Transition Profile, and the school acknowledge that siblings can be key support for disabled young people in the future.

The Transitions Solution Adviser has worked hard to implement changes that will make a difference for young people in Transition. Young people had been moving on from the school with no transitional visits, as planning was not completed at an early enough stage. This also raised issues that adult providers did not know the young person well enough to work with them. The school have now put several procedures in place to ensure that transition is a positive experience for both young people and those trying to support them.

Transition Assessment

The Transitions Solution Adviser has developed a Transition Profile for young people using a Person Centred Approach, and based on the West Midlands Transition Pathway. The assessment gives details of his self help and care needs it includes a section 'All About Me' that has information about health needs, communication, hopes and dreams for the future, keeping healthy and safe, things I like doing and people that are important to me. The profile also details pro-active and reactive behavioural strategies, and goes on to identify what support a young person will need when they leave the school. This assessment is a working document and is regularly updated particularly if the young person's needs change and is used to provide information for adult professionals and providers. The Transitions Solution Adviser also emphasises to any new provider the importance of every member of staff working with the young person seeing the profile so that they can work effectively with the young person. The school also produce a Communication Passport for each young person, which provides more in-depth information about how the young person communicates, which will also be given to the adult provider to use to support the young person.

Empowering Families

The Transitions Solution Adviser has found that an essential part of her work has been training and empowering families to speak up for the rights of their child. It was found that families often felt that they should just be grateful that their child was getting a service, whether or not it was appropriate to their needs. Parents had often felt like they were fighting the system to get their child into the residential school, and did not want to do the same again. The Transitions Solution Adviser now provides parents with a list of providers that have worked successfully with previous school students, and encourages them to go and visit. She also talks to parents about the type of questions that they should be asking during the visit. Families have also been offered training in the Community Care Assessment, and in ensuring that it contains all of the information that it needs to, and training in the benefits that are available to young people.

The Transitions Solution Adviser spends a lot of her time talking to parents about the options available to them, and advising them on situations that they are facing. This has given parents more confidence and abilities in speaking up for the rights of their child.

Support for Young People

Young people moving on from Sunfield are supported through transition to adult services in various ways. Previously young people may have been moved on with very little prior warning, due to fears this would increase anxiety and as a consequence result in an escalation in behaviours. Transition and moving on has now been made a normal part of life at Sunfield, with regular discussions in class about the next steps. Young people are now supported to go and visit some of their peers who have previously left the school, to see what it is like to have moved into an adult service, and classes will then discuss these visits. Young people may also

have pen pals, who are students that have already moved on. This also supports other members of the class, perhaps not yet due to move on, to understand what happens when their friends are no longer at the school.

Young people at the school have access to an independent advocate, who can support them through the transition process if required.

Support for Adult Providers

Sunfield works with staff from the new adult service throughout the transition process, to ensure that they are able to effectively support the young person. It begins with the Transitions Solution Adviser talking to service providers about the needs of the individual young person, and providing them with a copy of the young person profile. New providers are then invited to send staff to stay in the family accommodation at the school, to enable the new staff to work alongside the school staff, and to therefore allow the young person to become familiar with the new staff, and the new staff to learn how to effectively support the young person. New providers are also encouraged to contact the school during the first few difficult months following the young person's transition to the adult placement. If they have any areas that they are struggling with, and they can receive advice from the school, about how those issues have been dealt with in the past.

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