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Factsheet - Transition

We make many transitions in our lives, but perhaps the one with the most far reaching consequences is the transition into adulthood. For most young people, the process of moving from childhood to adulthood is a difficult time. The physical aspects of growing up are overlaid by the need to negotiate a complex set of changes in roles, relationships and status. Not least, the process typically involves huge changes in the environments in which people live (as they move away from the family home) and in which they spend their days.

The process is doubly complicated for young people with learning disabilities who rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on services. As well as the challenges everyone faces, they have the additional problem of managing the move between two sets of services: those for children and those for adults. This is not simply a case of moving from one otherwise similar set of organisations targeted at children, to a parallel entity concerned with adults. The reality is more complex than that: the two sets of services tend to be organised in very different ways and to have very different cultures.

The lack of coordination between children's and adult services has been widely recognised, as has dissatisfaction with transition planning and the arrangements that have been made for young people with learning disabilities as they move towards adulthood.

The Education Act 1993 and the associated Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Needs, say that if a young person has a statement of special educational need, they must have a transition plan drawn up by the Local Education Authority (LEA) at the

first annual review of their statement after their 14th birthday. In anticipation of the revised Code of Practice, this had begun to change when the young person enters Year 9 of school. The plan should be reviewed on an annual basis and should cover what will happen after the young person reaches the age of 16.

Young people with no transition plan

Although a transition plan is required for young people with a statement of special educational need, in practice often many of those still at school who are 14 or over do not have one. For many youngsters there has been no planning as far as the family knows. This may be because the young person is still too young, or they anticipated school-based planning would take place at some time in the future. Other reasons for the lack of a plan, such as a change of school or changes occurring in other services, may be the reality.

Involvement of the young person in planning their transition

Legislation and guidance directs that the transition plan must pay attention to the young person's perspective, and that the views of young people themselves should be sought and recorded whenever possible in any assessment, reassessment or review during the years of transition (Education Act 1993), and the associated Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special needs, (Sections 6.59 – 6.60). Indeed, ways of encouraging student decision-making during transition are suggested in the Guidance (Section 6.60). Similarly, the Children Act 1989 states that there is a duty for social service departments to involve all children/young people that they are in contact with in planning their futures.

Parental involvement in transition planning

Partnership with parents is one of the fundamental principles of the Code of Practice which recognises that effective assessment and provision will only be secured where there is the greatest possible degree of partnership between parents and their children, schools, local education authorities and other agencies. In addition to this general

right to involvement, parents have specific responsibilities and entitlements to documentation. The local education authority is obliged to invite the young person's parents to annual review meetings and to send them a copy of each review report; the transition plan should document parental expectations for the child, what the parents can contribute towards helping their child move closer towards an adult lifestyle, and what parents' own support and practical care needs will be. After all transition planning meetings, the transition plan should be copied to the parents.

A holistic approach to planning?

The transition plan itself is supposed to draw together information from a range of individuals, within and beyond the school, in order to plan coherently for the young persons' transition to adult life. This implies a holistic approach to planning, and the working up and implementation of the transition plan that touches on every aspect of the young persons' life: living arrangements, personal and social life, well-being, education, training and work.

Transition planning as a process

The process of planning for the future is meant to be an evolving one, with recognition that leaving school is just one step along the path of a longer journey.

Elements in a good transition experience should include the three "C's" - good communication, coordination, comprehensiveness, continuity and choice allowing creative and innovative initiatives to make transition as smooth as is possible.

Extracted from "Bridging the Divide at Transition: what happens for people with learning difficulties and their families" by Pauline Heslop, Robina Mallett, Ken Simons, Linda Ward