

# Developing a pathway model to support young disabled people and their families during transition to adulthood

## Chelmsford Post 16 Education Partnerships



In 2012, Chelmsford College, Columbus College, Essex Cares, ecdp and Essex County Council collaborated on a project to develop a pathway model designed to support disabled young people with special educational needs (SEN), from transition through to adulthood.

The pathway model is a support tool that demonstrates the options available to disabled young people as they approach adulthood. It incorporates 6 pathways designed to support families to think beyond school and to think about how a young disabled person can experience opportunities that lead to more independence and a fuller life.

The group recognized that disabled children with special educational needs (SEN) often struggle to understand the choices open to them as they approach adulthood and face multiple layers of paperwork, bureaucracy and agency assessments.

In addition, SEN statements are not joining up education, health and support and young people are falling between the gaps in service and prevented from achieving their full potential. By the time they reach transition, the system has failed and assessments provide too little support, too late.

Each pathway in the support tool includes a person centred case study designed to demonstrate the options available to disabled young people. By describing the processes and structures available to someone considering a particular pathway, it is hoped that parents and children will be able to develop a much more rounded person centred support plan that incorporates a variety of support needs including social independence, supported living, independent living (where appropriate), supported voluntary work, non-supported voluntary work, traineeships and paid employment.

Early identification and assessment are key to this process. The group believes that support should begin with a strong focus on transition at the end of year 9. For this reason, the tool should be made available prior to the transition process and not used as an add-on or afterthought at the point of transition. By picking up problems early, support plans will be designed for the long term and by involving young people and their families early in the process, planning aspirations can be raised and met.

### Partner Organisations

Chelmsford College are a Further Education provider, Columbus School is a post 16 Special School, Essex County Council are the local authority and represent funders / commissioners, Essex Cares provides social care services in Essex and ecdp is a charity run by and for disabled people.

By bringing together professionals from diverse disciplines, the aim was to support joint working and a multi-agency approach that puts young disabled people and their families at the centre of their support planning.

Additionally, the increased collaborative working across the group is designed to improve the knowledge, skills and expertise across the area including developing an increased awareness of shared strengths and opportunities to raise learner's expectations of further education and beyond.

By creating a shared approach to a young disabled persons' progression through transition that meets their needs & interests, it is hoped that current obstacles and barriers that learners and their families endure at key transition points can be removed.

## Development Challenges

The aim was to create a single and central point of information (an interactive support tool) that was accessible to parents, young disabled people and providers.

The partners felt the tool should be made available to parents and providers from as early as year 9 to ensure effective multi-agency working which it is hoped will improve understanding between parents and providers and ultimately improve planning and delivery.

By planning ahead the tool is designed to create a smoother transition process, to support parents and young people to develop a more person-centred support plan and in turn to ensure there is better and more cost effective provision in place when a young disabled person reaches adulthood.

One of the development challenges was how to fully incorporate the potential aspirations of parents and young disabled people into a single tool. While the 6 pathways cover a range of opportunities, including employment opportunities, they do not cover all possibilities.

The partners felt the tool should act as a gateway to a broader conversation between parents and providers rather than be all things to all people. By highlighting a range of possibilities, parents should begin to feel confident to approach providers on a case by case basis and jointly develop a bespoke support package that meets the specific needs and aspirations of the disabled young person.

There are also issues of content and accessibility. Changing legislation and changing local circumstances will need to be continually reflected in the tool to ensure it remains relevant and up-to-date. It is also important that once you give a voice to parents and young disabled people that providers are prepared to listen. This means that all the different elements of the transition process (strategic planning, policy and protocols, person centred planning and assessments, information and advice to young people and families) must be brought together to ensure a co-ordinated approach that ultimately improves services.

## Successes

Through this process we have achieved multi-agency senior management sign up and a model of partnership working that will ultimately support the development of the transition process.

The tool will be cascaded across a variety of accessible platforms. It will be necessary to collect qualitative and quantitative information about the success of the tool over time. The tool will initially be tested on a small cohort of young people post 19, looking to start blended learning programmes across the cluster network in Autumn 2013. Results from this initial pilot will be collated and distributed to relevant agencies.

## Legacy Challenges

There are a number of challenges associated with a multi-agency approach particularly when developing a holistic support tool. Different cultures, legislation and financial arrangements amongst the partners has required a level of adjustment and culture change.

The tool also requires a change of culture for families and young disabled people. As previously described, the tool is designed to enable a smoother transition process and provide parents and young disabled people with new possibilities. Where previously, parents and young disabled people have been faced with a one size fits all approach, the tool is designed to be more inclusive and more strategic. By developing more joined up working between partners, the tool is designed to lead to better planning and better decision making.

However, parents and young disabled people will need time to adjust to this new environment. Understanding the range of possibilities that can be accessed and how partners can work together to achieve the best possible outcomes will be an iterative process and require innovative ways of working including new ways of utilising funding streams. Partners will need to develop and maintain a two-way flow of information to ensure service users are properly empowered and begin to change the way they perceive their future support provision.

## Providers

Providers should be prepared to have an honest dialogue with parents and young disabled people about the possibilities and opportunities the tool provides. While the tool is designed to be inclusive it cannot be all things to all people. Funding will always be determined by assessed needs and this may restrict choices.

The development of the tool has provided the partners with an opportunity to share learning and create a forum for discussion aimed at creating better communications, good information sharing and a common vision.

Using the tool in practice – Some examples

### Pathway 4 – Supported Voluntary Employment

Julia is a young girl with autism and learning difficulties. Pathway 4 identifies what needs to happen so that Julia can lead a full life once she leaves education.

Initially, Julia will have a review in year 9. Julia and her family will be provided with information about individual budgets and support planning including information about welfare benefits and advocacy. Although Julia is unlikely to secure paid employment it is important to plan for possible volunteer opportunities. The pathway will be based on Julia's interests and abilities and draw on a number of sources for information. It is important that information is presented to Julia in way which enables her to understand the choices available to her. This information could be in the form of written stories, or involve hearing directly from people with learning disabilities who are already volunteering. The pathway will:

- identify providers that Julia can access from the ages of 14+
- work with care providers to design a bespoke package of care for Julia
- include assisted technology and other equipment that aids independence
- develop a process to implement long term, affordable and sustainable specialist placements for Julia in her local area. These placements should complement family and community relationships, develop social capital and place a premium on Julia's aspirations.

## Development of Pathway 4

Outputs include:

- The development of a comprehensive monitoring and tracking process for person centred 14 + reviews which records critical information that will support future commissioning in a clear and accessible way.
- Development of a commissioning process in line with existing practice within Adults Support Services for young people in transition

## Proposed Outcome

A bespoke support plan established aimed at meeting Julia's aspirations and chosen outcomes as well as meeting her assessed needs. Through early involvement, our intention is to secure funding from the appropriate adult team to avoid delays in service development.

## Pathway 6 - Paid Employment

Ben is a young man with learning difficulties associated with hydrocephalus. He attended a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties.

Ben's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) describes him as 'a highly motivated pupil whose main problem is reading comprehension'.

As Ben approaches 16 years old he is preparing for the transition from children's to adult social care. Ben has expressed an interest in finding paid employment.

Traditionally, Ben would be perceived as not being ready for employment or work-related training. His options might include taking an 'Essential Skills' course at a local College of Further Education (FE). However, this would be unlikely to meet Ben's needs as he would struggle to keep up in mainstream college and would need additional support.

Pathway 6 recognises that Ben should be offered employment opportunities but recognises that it might take a little longer for him to gain employment. On Pathway 6 agencies will work together to provide Ben with:

- 1:1 sessions with a job coach
- Group work sessions to develop soft employability skills and build confidence
- Development sessions around interview skills and practice
- Visits to employers
- Work experience placements
- Job coaching and ongoing in work support once a learner has entered employment. The job coach also draws together all other existing services for the young person, ensuring that they have access to the best possible support and opportunities available.

ecdp currently runs an award winning employment training programme for disabled people and will offer advice to parents and disabled young people interested in pathway 6.

A Disability Employment Advisor will work with Ben to develop suitable employment opportunities including providing support or coaching at a later stage once Ben is in employment.

## Development of Pathway 6

Outputs include:

- An Opportunities Fair bringing together service users and providers

- Practical workshops which would enable young people to gain hands on experience which helps inform decisions about their future education, training and employment

## Aims of Fair

- Sharing information with disabled young people and their families about what they could do when they leave school.
- Providing information about the transition process
- Enabling young people to experience what it might be like to pursue different options after school, through workshops.
- Providing an enjoyable day for disabled young people where they learn with someone different from their usual teachers.
- Developing links with colleges in the region and making parents feel more informed and confident when considering future placements.
- Helping employers, who were invited, to showcase good practice including disabled young people but also to increase their understanding of the benefits of employing disabled young people.
- Enabling 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.
- Inviting a wide range of professionals, businesses and providers to stimulate networking
- Ensuring that 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.

Pathway 6 is designed to encourage aspirations, expand person-centred planning and support a disabled young person to reach their potential, lead a fulfilling life and become economically active wherever possible.

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