

# Improving Choices for Individuals.. Challenging Expectations

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## Summary

This case study looks at the provisions required to engage a student with profound, emotional and mild learning difficulties as well as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), into further education and vocational/life skills. The student has recently moved on from the school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties he had attended for the past six years, during which time he was placed into care with limited access to his family. In October 2012 he turned 18 and as a result made the transition into Adult Care Services, again moving into a new area and a new flat within a specialist supported living facility. In September 2012 the student enrolled onto an individual learning programme at North Herts College in conjunction with Church Farm.

His difficult family background, along with all of the above recent changes has had a profound effect on him and his ability to cope and engage within his new environments.

Due to the above points, a bespoke timetable was created for the student to aim to provide a suitable range of experiences in both an educational and vocational setting.

## Key lessons learned

- Information sharing is fundamental to be able to create a suitable Programme.
- Normal approach to curriculum design is not always applicable.
- Prior information and communication is fundamental in the planning of a bespoke programme.
- A flexible approach and to be able to adapt to changes as they happen.
- Knowledge and access to applicable provisions
- Key relationships between the learner and professional.
- Working collaboratively with other partners to offer a holistic approach to individual's education.

## Introduction

### North Hertfordshire College & Rural Care, Church Farm Ardeley

North Hertfordshire College (NHC) is a College of Further Education (FE) who facilitates courses for a range of mainstream and disabled learners.

Rural Care, Church Farm Ardeley offer work related experiences and an alternative education environment for FE colleges and special education schools.

## What we wanted to achieve

To enable the student to make the transition from school to an adult life and equip him with the skills he needs to cope and move forward.

The problems faced were the student's attachment to aspects of his childhood (Family/school/routine) and his difficulty in moving on from these. One of the major issues for the student was that once he turned 18, many of these issues were forced upon him at the same time (moving home and leaving school).

The bespoke timetable was planned to enable both organisations to address the issues above as the main focus of his programme, for as long as required.

## Implementation

### Planning our approach

It is hoped that working together, sharing experiences and regular communication will help to create a model of close partnership and working with shared strategies.

The link between the College and Church Farm aims to develop the existing partnership by being consistent in approach, and sharing common goals in order to be able to provide on-going provision to individuals who may not otherwise be able to access further education.

### What we did

- **Regular communication between organisations**

We have regular communication in place in the form of weekly reports which are shared between staff who work with the student at NHC and the farm. Examples of these are included with this case study. Using these, we are able to get information from one to the other quickly which then informs each organisation of any incidents or issues that might affect their session. A session report is shared between organisations

- **Holistic approach to information sharing this is outcome between all stakeholders (carers, social workers, transport, support staff, tutors)**

Communication between professionals has been vital, information can be passed on through transport to college about how the students' morning session has been at the farm, and they are also able to share information with both organisations and home about issues that the student may talk to them about. There is no specific output as we need to be flexible in our communication. Tutor is the key information point and they distribute information as and when required.

- **Shared learning outcomes and strategies**

Where we are able to devise and share learning outcomes, it has helped to give the individual a consistent approach from the range of different staff working with him (connects to communication point above). We have for example developed a session plan template which for consistency is used in all sessions with the student, by both organisations. A copy of this is included with our output. The same applies with strategies, which have been devised and shared across the team, proving more successful than using isolated strategies which would could confuse a person with ASD, especially when there already so many new things/procedures to get to grips with in a new setting. The course tutor is responsible for collecting information to devise and adapt a learning programme and strategies, regular meetings between professionals take place and the information is evaluated.

- **Realistic goal setting taking into account the individual**

Being able to focus on the basic outcome of settling into and coping with a new environment has enabled us to work at an appropriate level with the student, who has very complex issues and at times testing emotional and behavioural difficulties. To have been caught in

the constraints of usual learning and curriculum led aims, would have proved too much for this individual and possibly led to failure of his placement.

## Outcomes and impacts

### What we achieved

We have set up good lines of communication and information sharing between the organisations. We have shared strategies on how to engage the student and ways of dealing with challenging behaviour, which have helped to provide consistency for the individual. Good communication has allowed for cross agency working; for example where there have been issues related to food, we have been able to use good experiences in one setting to support strategies in the other.

This level of consistency has benefited the student so far in supporting his adjustment period. It has been a steep learning curve for all staff connected to the student and some of the outcomes so far have not been positive. However, we are all learning with each new experience and more positive outcomes are starting to emerge.

The data and reports compiled so far show that small steps of progress are being made in regard to the students settling into his new environment. This was the main aim for his first term.

### What we learned

- Information sharing has been fundamental in enabling us to create a suitable and flexible programme for the student. It has enabled us to more effectively support the individuals' very complex needs.
- We are constantly learning from the student and tailoring our approach to his learning outcome.
- Our normal approach to curriculum design (course enrolment with links to other provisions which enhanced their learning environment) was not applicable in this case.
- Prior information and communication was fundamental in the planning of a bespoke programme and on-going assessment is needed to achieve the outcomes.
- We have learnt that it has been and continues to be essential that all staff working with the student need to have a flexible approach and be able to adapt to changes as they happen.
- Knowledge and access to provisions applicable to the learners changing needs have also been fundamental in his progression and our understanding.
- Important relationships between the learner and professional have been created and the communication between partners has enabled those relationships to be successful (talking about him creating important relationships with Keyworker at his home, support staff at the farm, and one male tutor in particular college. These have been the long standing relationships that have made the difference for him, the rest all happens behind closed doors as such).
- The project has informed the partners, particularly NHC and Church Farm of the importance of flexibility for this type of learner, working collaboratively with other partners to offer a holistic approach to the individual's education.

### What we are taking forward

We need to continue to work on settling the student into his new environment in order to gain his trust and confidence. This will then enable us to build on his coping strategies, in the first instance in terms of making choices and being able to communicate effectively. By achieving these goals, we aim to engage the student into more social settings and a suitable learning programme.

The project in this instance has two clear outcomes; one offers a sustainable future for the student in terms of enabling him to access further education and provisions for adult life. The other creates a sustainable model for future individuals in similar situations. The scheme allows for a more person centred approach to further education, offering a local provision rather than an out of county option.

### **How we are sharing it**

We have Uploaded a series of downloadable PDF's onto the EG which are referenced and link to our case study.

1. Example of Behaviour Contract – developed and shared with farm & NHC this document ensures both organisations are working to the same agreed rules.
2. Daily Report example – Farm – shared via email with **all** staff working with student, this enables all parties working with the student have information on any progression/issues or just things to be aware of. This has been vital in monitoring the student's progression and informing all parties of issues.
3. Daily Report example – NHC– shared via email with **all** staff working with student, again as above.
4. Sample Session plan template– for use in all sessions with student, for consistency, this is used by both organisations.
5. Example of bespoke timetable, although this has changed on many occasions it shows how flexible the timetable has had to be.

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