

Stop Gap -Improving Choices, supporting transition, securing outcomes through multi agency working

Francesca Ntiamoah Stop Gap



Overview of project:

To support a learner with Asperger's Syndrome and sensory difficulties around particular noises (laughter in particular) and an extreme fear of certain types of weather (rain, thunder and lightning). This learner was very bright academically, articulate and high functioning with a classic spikey profile. He had completed GCSEs at school and was supported to undertake A levels. However due to the level of self-directed learning and independence that is required for A level study, sixth form soon broke down. After several months at home a referral was made to Stop Gap. Initial assessments revealed that what was perceived as sensory difficulties were in fact fears, this young person also did not have any level of independence be it in travelling, self-organisation, management of work/ tasks, self-regulation and an inability to problem solve effectively in situations that proved to deviate from the norm (which can be typical for those on the spectrum). As a result this learner suffered from extreme anxiety and at 17 yrs. of age relied heavily on his parents for prompting and guidance. Extended taster sessions at Stop Gap combined with in-depth discussions with parents enabled team members to construct a detailed assessment of his difficulties. The nature of the Stop Gap programme seeks to take elements of foundation learning alongside our programme model and curriculum to put together a tailored and personalised Individual Outreach Plan (IOP) designed to be dynamic and responsive to this young man's changing needs as he progresses through the programme.

What the project set out to do and why (

The primary aim for this learner was to focus on independence and empowerment by enabling him to become more independent in his thinking, actions and behaviour, to travel independently and to develop problem solving skills and to ask for help as and

when challenges arose and importantly to understand the anxiety and fears around 'laughter' and rain, thunder and lightning. As well as his main personal challenges described above, his programme also comprised of targets towards forming relationships and making friends, accessing social activities, participating in art and drama therapy and completing the functional skills level 2 in English and ICT as well as other qualifications around employability and citizenship. Underpinning this was supporting this learner to think about progression options following Stop Gap. It became apparent as we worked with him that what this young person described as his aspirations around employment transpired to be what his parents felt he would be more suited to as opposed to what he actually wanted to do or would enjoy doing. This learner had no idea as to what he wanted to do in the future in terms of employment. Part of his Stop Gap programme would therefore focus on Careers advice and Guidance in collaboration with Youth Connexions Hertfordshire throughout the duration of his programme. To complement this it was agreed he would undertake taster sessions and extended work experience to provide a concrete reference point for thinking around vocational aspirations for the future.

What the project has achieved so far

This student completed his Stop Gap programme in the summer of 2012 with the following outcomes:

1. Fully travel trained and able to use buses and trains (able to read timetables, knowledge of what to do in the event of delays, traffic etc.)
2. Overcame fear of the rain, thunder and lightning through exposure therapy initiated by Stop Gap and supported by parents.
3. He is now able to problem solve by reviewing an event and thinking about a plan (a), (b) and (c), he carries a mobile phone which he uses to call when late or delayed but also if he has difficulties can call parents IF necessary.
4. Gained the Level 2 Functional Skills in English, ICT, L2 Certificate in Employability skills, L1 Certificate Citizenship.
5. Undertook a one year extended work experience at a community café and discovered a passion for cooking and catering and decided to enter Further Education to complete a Hospitality and Catering qualification.
6. Now at West Herts College on the Hospitality Course (working in a noisy training kitchen and restaurant and surviving)
7. Course tutors report good progress to date.

Collaborative working with all key stakeholders

The success of this learner's attainment and progression was due to close partnership working at every transitional phase. All stakeholders - initially the young

person, parents and Stop Gap worked together to construct and agree the learning plan and as a result each had an exact overview of their specific role and the intended outcomes for the young person. This created buy in and ownership. At the stage of transition in to FE this extended to course tutors and learning support to ensure reports were shared that would best enable future practitioners to meet needs of this learner.

Change management and regular review

Early intervention planning was crucial to the success of the programme - identifying foreseeable barriers to learning and then identifying solutions to address these at the start, during or after the programme. Weekly one to one key working with the student enabled problems to be resolved earlier as and when they arose. Weekly communication with staff as well as with parents ensured attainment of programme outcomes. This also enabled this young person on the autistic spectrum to view change as inevitable and not necessarily negative, equipping him with the resources to communicate and manage change. Parents were invited to liaise and communicate with Stop Gap team members when necessary through an open door policy as well as to attend termly consultation meetings with the wider team to discuss and review progress.

It is important to note that parents were incredibly supportive of their son and of Stop Gap and were very open to new ideas and suggestions and thus this partnership enabled excellent collaborative working between staff, parents, other professionals and the young person.

What the project still needs to do

Stop Gap will continue to monitor this young man and his outcome at the College for the next 6 months by initiating regular contact with the young person, parents and the college. The transition for this young person and parents was excellent. A series of meetings in July/ August prior to the start of the new academic year secured a successful hand over to college tutors and Head of learning support, ensuring support needs would be met and reasonable adjustments made. An outcome of this learners experience and transition to the local College has been the development of future practice. This case study has clearly demonstrated the importance of earlier identification of young people wanting to access FE, followed by effective liaison with parents, connexions and appropriate FE personnel to look at and discuss transition between Stop Gap and the college. As a result we have developed clear protocols around transition and support which include:

1. Robust Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) for the young person and parents on appropriateness and suitability of considered FE programme

2. Informal discussions with programme tutors/ admissions personnel to unpick and discuss programme content and whether young person could access.
3. The arrangement of a series of informal visits to the college for young person
4. Support for the young person being provided at interview on acceptance of college application.
5. A meeting between parents, the young person and learning support to identify levels of support
6. Continued liaison between Stop Gap and key college staff once the young person is on programme to ensure sustainability of programme attendance for a term.

In addition, to support sustainability Hertfordshire Local Authority are this year funding a new role for a Transition Link Adviser attached to Stop Gap whose primary remit will focus on entry and exit of learners to the Stop Gap programme. The Link Adviser will not only ensure that the above protocols are in place but will also support the achievement of the following:

- Liaison with local mainstream and special schools to identify suitable young people for provision, the co-ordination of meetings between school, parents and Stopgap, setting up taster sessions, conducting observations of the young person at school, setting up interview at Stop Gap, co-ordinating and ensuring the timely submission of funding paperwork.
- Supporting the young person on exit by contributing to and informing the progression and next step plan, and once complete formulating with the young person, parent/carers and key professionals an appropriate exit strategy and route.
- Continuing to monitor the young person in their outcome for an agreed period usually between 12-16 weeks.

What the project wants to share with the sector

- **A robust and dynamic package of learning with clear and agreed outcomes**

A framework that will inform the journey can be very useful for a young person with autism and their parents. It can ease anxiety, provide a clear plan and should NOT be set in stone. The learning plan should develop, grow and change with the young person as targets are achieved or changed to reflect at any given time where in their learning journey the learner is.

- **Shared next step and transition planning**

From the outset of this young man's programme next step planning formed an integral part and this in turn informed the educational and support package and this

helped him to begin to slowly think about the short to medium term goal- a concept that can for some on the spectrum evoke anxiety. In practice however this proved to actually ease anxiety for the young person and parents as there was an agreed way forward.

- **Aftercare and support (keeping in touch)**

Regular three way (between young person, professionals and parent/carers) communication can ensure that outcomes are sustained. This gives the young person and parents reassurance that they have not be abandoned as such and for professionals it could involve additional support and/or the sharing of good practice.

Key Learning points

1. Parental buy in is essential and this can be achieved through transparency, joint planning and review.
2. The curriculum needs to be innovative, dynamic, flexible and responsive to change (life happens)
3. Early intervention planning by identifying existing and potential barriers to the learning journey and experience is essential.
4. Manage change effectively by promoting a culture of change as an opportunity rather than a threat or a weakness.
5. Regular reviews are essential
6. It is important to have transparency with key stakeholders (staff, professionals, parent/carers and young person) during all stages of planning through agreed and established channels of communication
7. Ensure early and timely next step planning with stakeholders
8. Provide aftercare support to ensure sustainability of outcome for the young person
9. Share good practice- by providing detailed reports on the young person which can be used to inform the next stage.

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