

## **Nash College**

### **Involving learners in shaping their own support**

#### **“How can I review my support?”**



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Nash College, an independent specialist college providing residential and day further education for up to 78 young people aged from 18 to 25, is situated in Hayes, Bromley. Learners have a broad range of support needs due to severe and complex learning, communication, medical conditions and physical disabilities. A growing number of learners present challenging behavioural needs and are on the autistic spectrum. 38% of learners are from ethnic minority groups.

There are 265 multi-disciplinary staff including education, residential and care staff, speech and language, physio, occupational, music, art, relaxation and aroma therapists, counsellor, psychologist and psychology assistants, specialist nurses and consultant psychiatrist. 39% of staff are from ethnic minority groups. The curriculum is broad and varied, providing a vehicle for learning for living, tailored to each individual learner's needs.

#### **ELS resources/materials used**

Owing to the severe learning disabilities of the college's learners a symbol and photograph based resource was selected which focussed on learners reviewing their own support (appendix 1). Initially developed by National Star College, the 'My Support' resource allowed for additional individual resources to be developed by Nash College staff to meet each learner's specific communication and cognitive needs.

One of the organisational aims is 'to reduce levels of support' and it was hoped that this approach would enable learners and staff to work together to promote autonomy.

#### **Use/implementation of resources/materials**

A reference group of five male learners was established to guide the project, three were white, one black British African and one Afro-Caribbean. One learner has autistic spectrum disorder, one uses British Sign Language (BSL), and all use symbols and photographs, some with supporting text.

Due to the learners' complex communication difficulties, it was too confusing for them to evaluate their support in general, so it was decided they would choose an area of personal importance and identify a specific context on which to focus. After using the resources for one context, they would then identify others.

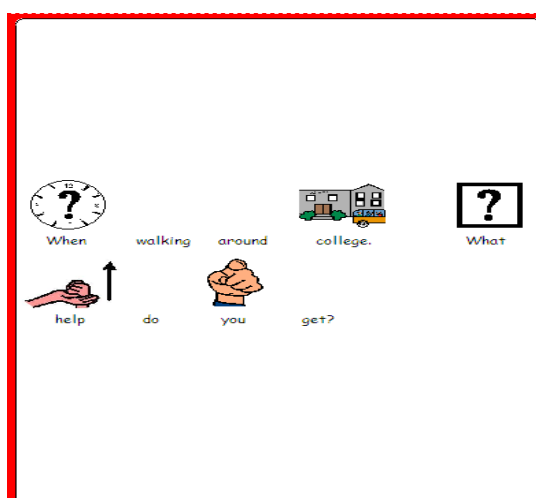
The study relates to the learners' first chosen context where they wished to become more independent. A member of staff was allocated to work with each learner and the table below shows their initial choices.

Learner	Chosen area for development
A	Find my way around college independently
B	Make a cup of tea independently
C	Transferring from wheelchair with the support of two staff rather than three
D	Transferring from wheelchair with the support of one staff rather than two
E	Complete gardening tasks independently

An example of how students were supported to complete the 'My Support' document is Learner 'A' who chose 'Finding My Way around the College'

To enable 'A' to answer questions about his support levels for finding his way around the college each question was broken down and written in symbol format, supported by speech and signing. 'A' was given as much time as was needed to provide an answer. After choosing the 'context', he was then asked what support he was currently receiving, (see Fig. 1), what support he would like and then he agreed actions with his facilitator. His answers expressed by means of total 'communication' i.e. signing, body language, gestures, vocalisations, objects, photos and symbols, were then translated by his facilitator and written on the 'My Support' document.

Figure 1



Initially 'A' had 1:1 support but wanted to walk around college on his own. He was unsure where all the college rooms were and felt that he might get lost. He was given several examples of the possible design and layout of his 'guidance' resource i.e. photos of his destination and of locations on the way. 'A' chose single photographs of his destinations and asked that staff helped him initially to use the environmental signage until he gained the confidence to navigate his way around the college independently using the photographs.

His college timetable was changed to include a 10 cms x 10 cms photograph of the room, attached with Velcro. He could remove the picture and use it to find the correct room and to ask staff for assistance if required. Figure 2 shows an example of a photograph that 'A' chose which he could carry easily whilst walking and also fit onto his timetable.

Figure 2



## Outcomes

'A' initially asked for photo-cards in order to help him recognise the rooms he was going to, however after using them and the college signage for a few weeks, he was able to successfully navigate himself to rooms throughout the day independently.

See Appendices 1 and 2 (which includes the outcome)

Similarly successful approaches using individual resources supported by speech, gesture and signing were developed for the other four learners. The progress of the project was reviewed and evaluated at regular intervals. The outcomes for each learner are given in the following table:

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Chosen area for development</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>A</b>	Find my way around college independently	Achieved
<b>B</b>	Make a cup of tea independently	Achieved with supervision
<b>C</b>	Transferring from wheelchair with the support of two staff rather than three	Achieved
<b>D</b>	Transferring from wheelchair with the support of one staff rather than two	Achieved
<b>E</b>	Complete gardening tasks independently	Achieved for a range of basic tasks and has now been offered work experience at the Environmental Centre where he was learning the tasks.

After achieving their first chosen 'context' the learners have identified additional areas to work on and are currently doing so.

### Summary of outcomes

Using the 'My Support' resource enabled the five learners to successfully identify areas where they wished to increase their independence and reduce support. This enabled staff and learners to take action and monitor the significant progress they have made in their chosen areas.

### Impact – the benefits

The learners have benefitted by being able to 'drive' their own progress, identifying what is important for them and participating fully in making it work. By working on their own priorities, they are motivated to improve and therefore achieve in a relatively short time. The 'visual' presentation of the LSIS resource gives them clear evidence of achievement (Appendix 2). The resource was adapted to include learners' evaluations of their chosen area for development and these evidence the value of the approach developed through the project (Appendices 3 to 7).

The multidisciplinary staff team has benefitted by being able to focus on supporting learning in very specific areas, enabling learners to make significant progress. The LSIS resource provided a clear guide and consistent and focussed approach in relevant contexts. The staff have also got to know the learners better and the process of identifying their own support needs has consolidated the partnership required to ensure learning and progress, together with providing the most efficient and effective levels of support. Senior Management support to develop knowledge and practice has ensured considerable benefit to the staff involved.

### Next steps and future plans

The College plans to continue using this approach in the future, adapting it as appropriate to meet the differing needs and skills of learners.

During the summer term the learners using this approach will increase from five to 20 and the initial project facilitator will be providing support and development for all staff involved. After further evaluation of impact the number of learners will increase to 40 and a strategy will be developed to adapt the resources for 100% of learners. The impact will be evaluated termly.

### **Overall Summary**

The project has proved extremely successful, providing motivation for learners and a clear focus for staff. These have combined to create successful outcomes for learners. The college will now integrate these resources into its current goal/target-setting, teaching and monitoring learning processes for all learners and thoroughly recommends that other providers engage their learners more directly in 'reviewing their own support'.

Case Study prepared by Angela Farrin and Kieran Hopcraft, Nash College

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