

TRANSITION PLANNING – The way ahead ?

Growing up, becoming an adult and leaving school are challenges for any child (and their parents!). When a child has additional needs families can face many extra difficulties. **Transition Planning** is a process that helps young people move through adolescence to adulthood - educationally, emotionally, physically and as individuals within society. It should not be a single event or meeting but a live, on-going process that lasts over a number of years. If your child has a statement then the process will begin in Y9, and the first plan **must** be completed after the annual review and updated at least once a year. By the time they are 16yrs all the arrangements should be in place so that you will know if your child is going onto Further Education, employment, residential college or placement. Governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have passed or will pass laws that say this should happen. That's the theory. But if you want to make sure that this process is successful then it is important that parents start to think about transition a lot sooner. A recent study, "Bridging the Divide", carried out by Norah Fry Research and the HFT (Home Farm Trust) has highlighted a number of problems with Transition Planning:

- Young people themselves had little meaningful involvement in planning their future even though legislation stresses that, "their views and aspirations are central to the process".
- Many youngsters had left school without a transition plan
- There was a lack of easily accessible information for parents and young people about what future possibilities might be
- The quality of transition planning varied widely
- The topics covered in transition planning were often quite different from those that families considered to be important such as leisure and social opportunities, information on benefits, housing options.
- Key issues (e.g. transfer to adult health or social services) had still not been addressed by the time some young people had left school
- Whether or not youngsters had received transition planning made little difference to what happened to them after leaving school
- Most transition planning is initiated by schools and tends to focus on college or residential placements. There were few post-school options, particularly in relation to housing and employment, available to young people

The most negative part of the whole planning process was the lack of any real options **to move on to**. If at this point you feel like selling up and moving to a small tropical island, don't despair, there is *some* good news on the horizon. There are a number of organisations, voluntary and government, who are trying to improve the process using one or more of the following methods: – Person Centred Planning (PCP), Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP), Families Leading Planning and Circles Network.

Person Centred Planning

Until recently planning for a person's future had always centred on their, 'needs', physical, medical, educational and social. Person Centred Planning (PCP) is a totally different approach that puts the young person at the centre of the plan and then everyone can focus on looking at what that person 'wants'. Plans are developed that consider everything from that person's **own** perspective. It should involve listening and learning about what that person want from their life and helping them to think about their future. Family, friends, professionals and services work together with the person involved to make the plan happen. The process can help the person and their family and friends think about who is important in that person's life and discover their dreams and wishes. Whatever their level of disability or difficulty in communicating it should be possible to find out what activities that young person enjoys, who they enjoy being with, their likes and dislikes.

(Communication passports are one way of describing this essential knowledge about a person – it uses photos, video, tapes, any form of media that can best convey the information about the person and the kind activities they enjoy. How that person likes to sit, eat; videos they watch; shops they enjoy visiting; show who their friends and family are. It's an invaluable source of information about that person which can be very useful when there is any change in support personnel).

Partnership boards have been set up in each local authority in order to make strategic plans for developing services across Health, Education and Social Services. They should also have a framework that describes how they are going to put PCP into practice and what training and support is available to families.

Families Leading Planning

Government guidance on PCP says that all families should have an opportunity to learn about PCP and decide what involvement they want. Quite often all they will want is information about what to expect from services and how they will contribute to the plan. Other families will want to play a more direct role and lead the development of the plan themselves. There are a number of ways that families can get help to do this.

- Train with the staff to learn how to facilitate the plan
- Train just with other families
- Get help and support on an individual basis from service staff, independent or voluntary agencies

Essential Lifestyle Planning

This is a way of discovering what is important to a person in their everyday lives. The information can be listed in a way that helps service providers (e.g. Health, Education, Social Services) be consistent in their approach and the way they deliver services. Originally Burke-Harrison and Smull developed it to help people with complex disabilities leave long-term institutional care. Key people in the individual's life are asked to consider the things that are important in that person's life. The information is sorted into three main categories, the essentials or non-negotiable, important or strong preferences and things that the person likes. From this

information it is possible to build up a picture of the people and things that **must** be present (or absent) in that individual's life in order for them to achieve their preferred lifestyle.

Circles of Support

A circle of support is a group of individuals who meet together with the sole intention of supporting a young person who is likely to become isolated from their community because of their special needs. The group is made up of people who know the person well and who are prepared to listen and help that person realise their dreams and ambitions. Parents, brothers and sisters, friends and committed support workers all work together to discover the information that will give that person a 'voice'. The circle can help present the young person's own contribution towards the planning of their life. The CREDO (Creating Real and Equal Development Opportunities) project is funded by the National Lotteries Board and designed to support young people (13-19 yrs) with profound and complex impairments. There are currently two projects; one in England and the other in Northern Ireland and both are looking at the move from childhood to adulthood. In the CREDO Project, it is the young person with complex needs that owns and controls the process with the assistance of those people in their life who know them best i.e. their circle of support. Often young people with profound and complex impairments only come into contact with people who are paid to support them. The Circles network is made of people who are volunteers and are committed to inclusive societies that aim at interdependence. They are concerned about that person's future, they support them through difficult times; they work to create opportunities and solve problems.

The study, "Bridging the Divide" concluded that there were five key elements in a good transition process, which they called the 'Five C's', summarised below.

1. **Communication** –which is open, honest and respectful between agencies and families; and gives and an independent voice for young people
2. **Coordination**- between all the agencies so that they work together effectively and plan a consistent approach to service provision.
3. **Comprehensiveness** - an effective transition plan for all young people that considers appropriate race and disability equality training for all staff; that has expectation that young people with learning difficulties will be able to access the same opportunities to realise their dreams as their peers do.
4. **Continuity** - key workers to support individual youngsters and their families throughout the transition process so that there is a seamless transition from children's to adult services and a range of options for young people to move into and between.
5. **Choice** - more and better involvement of young people and their families in the transition process with good access to appropriate information on potential options as well as a range of local post-school alternatives in housing and employment

I would add a sixth

6. **Commitment** - from the schools and external agencies to have regard to the timing and implementation of the Transition Plan; from parents and carers to drive forward the plan and demand the support needed to fulfil the plan.

I have included a list of useful web sites and contact details if you want further information. You will need to find out what's available in your area and contact those groups directly. The important thing to remember is, " **Don't leave it until last moment!**" You may feel that services for children with disabilities are not particularly good now but the evidence suggests it is even **less** satisfactory once they become adults. That is why it is vital that parents and carers take an interest early on to ensure they get the best for their child.

If you live in **England** then the **Connexions Service** is your first port of call. It has specific responsibilities for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities as described in the SEN code of Practice and the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It is their job to provide young people who have learning or physical disability with a **Personal Advisor** who will be the critical link that brings together all the support services. You can find your local Connexions service through your child's school, the LEA (Local Education Authority), or by contacting one of the 47 Local Partnership. These can be found at www.connexion.gov.uk/partnerships/ or you can write to Connexions Service National Unit, Department for Education and Skills, Moorfoot, Sheffield, S1 4PQ. Connexions service is not available in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland but you can get information about transition services from:

Northern Ireland: MENCAP has published a guide for young people preparing to leave school called, "What next?" It can be viewed and downloaded from www.mencap.org.uk/download/what_next_parents.pdf or contact the Family Advisor Helpline 0845 763 6227. There is a Regional Office in Belfast: 028 9064 0121. If you don't have broadband then it will take a while to download, otherwise ring and ask them to send you a copy.

Wales: Youth Gateway uses a team of dedicated Personal Advisors to guide young people through transition. Contact through your local Careers Centre or Careers Wales Association, Suite 6, Block D, Van Court, Caerphilly Business Park, Van Road, Caerphilly CF83 3ED. Telephone: 02920 854880 **Email:** enquiries@careerswales.com Website Address: www.careerswales.com .

Scotland: Careers Scotland provides information, services and support. Telephone: 0845 8 502 502 or

Visit their web-site : www.careers-scotland.org.uk . Not a huge amount of information available at the moment. **PAMIS (Promoting A More Inclusive Society)** is a voluntary organisation in Scotland that works with young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties, their family, carers and professional who support them. **Head Office**, Springfield House, 15/16 Springfield, University of Dundee, Dundee, DD1 4JE, Tel: 01382 345 154, Email: pamis@dundee.ac.uk . They have produced a pack, 'Life after School' that assists parents with many of the issues that arise during the transition from child to adult services. (It's free if you live in East Dunbartonshire but £18 !! for everyone else. I would try to get your local library to order it for you)

Other useful sources of information on transition can be found at Trans-active a project where teenager with and without learning disabilities work together. They have developed Communication Passports using multi-media. Contact by email: trans-active@mencap.org.uk. Telephone: 0121-707-7877 or write to The Trans-active Project, 4 Swan Courtyard, Coventry Road, Birmingham. B26 1BU.

TransPlan is a practical interactive step-by-step guide to successful transition for young people age 13 - 19 with Statements of Special Educational Need. Available FREE from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottinghamshire, NG15 0DJ. Telephone 0845 6022260 e-mail dfes@prolog.uk.com

I understand there are only a few copies left so hurry and put your order in!!

One of the 11 SEN Regional Partnerships, South West, has written an excellent guide to Transition Planning, which can be downloaded from the site at www.sw-special.co.uk. The DfES (Department of Education and Skills) sponsors 11 sites in England that cover all the local authorities. Each partnership brings together groups of LEAs, Health, Social Services and the private and voluntary sectors. They aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of SEN processes and services and inter-agency working. (We all have to live in hope!) Contact them for information on Transition Planning in your region. National Adviser for the SEN Regional Partnerships: Claire Lazarus Tel 020 7925 6421 or email Claire.lazarus@dfes.gsi.gov.uk. You can visit the website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/regional

The Valuing People Team, part of the Department of Health, has a website on Transition which can be found at www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/Transition.htm.

MENCAP has set up a helpline and a website specifically to answer questions and provide information on anything to do with learning disability. It can be found at www.askmencap.info or you can telephone 0808 808 1111 if you live in England, if you live in Northern Ireland then it's 0845 763 6227 and the Welsh can call 0808 8000 300. If you live anywhere else I would still try these numbers to get help – just watch your accent!

If the thought of having to track down this information has put you into a cold sweat – DON'T PANIC! I would suggest that you start with the school first and ask what information they have available on transition. If that does not help then move onto Social Services, most of whom will have someone dealing with transition. You can always ask them to get you copies of documents mentioned above. Don't forget your local voluntary groups such as Contact a Family who have also written about Transition. Your Parent Advisor will also be able to help.