

Learning example

Transition Group to develop the independent living skills of young people with SEND – Local Authority of Wakefield

Introduction

Using funding from the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Programme (SBIP), Wakefield run a 'transition group' for young people with SEND and/or complex needs who need additional support with developing independent living skills as they prepare for adulthood.

Wakefield run two group sessions a week with up to six young people, for a total of six weeks. If a young person needs additional sessions after six weeks, there have the flexibility to assign them to another group. The intensity of the programme means young people can receive focused, targeted support to practise basic independent living skills at a crucial transition point in their lives.

This learning example explores why Wakefield faced minimal challenges while running the group, due to a clear understanding of the needs of the young people and their decision to host the group in an existing short break service with staff members who have good knowledge and skills in relation to SEND.

Some of the key learning includes:

- The importance of utilising local strengths and resources when setting up a new support group, such as staff already working across the SEND system and hosting the group in familiar short break services with the right facilities.
- How in-depth understanding of gaps in local service provision for young people with SEND and families' concerns about preparation for adulthood offer a framework to speed up planning and target support at the right cohort of young people.

The difference that valuing the relationship between staff members and young people and being flexible to their needs can make to young people's outcomes in shorter-term support programmes.

Aims and Objectives

The key objective of the transition group is to extend and strengthen the support available to young people with SEND as they prepare for adulthood. The group helps young people understand, practise, and improve their independent living skills, and ultimately empower them to better manage the transition to adult services. By supporting young people who are either approaching or have recently turned 18, the intervention targets those most at risk of experiencing a 'cliff edge' as their support from children's services ends.

The group develops young people's practical independent living skills, such as cooking meals, making their bed, and using the washing machine. The need for this provision was first

understood following a general review of Wakefield's existing short breaks offer for young people with SEND. Feedback from parent carers revealed a widespread concern that young people were at risk of poorer outcomes due to the lack of practical support with independent living skills, and general anxieties about the challenges with transitioning out of children's services.

Approach

Deciding on the setting:

Before starting the new transition group, Wakefield had sought to reduce the risk of a 'cliff edge' in support for young adults by extending some overnight short breaks provision past the age of 18. They restructured a care home to provide overnight short breaks to two groups of young people, those who are under 18, and those who are over 18 and need some additional time and support in a familiar environment before they leave children's services. Wakefield decided to host the 'transition group' in this familiar setting, to support and encourage young people's engagement.

Allocating staff:

Wakefield approached established and highly skilled staff to run the transition group, allocating additional hours to care workers who usually work as short breaks delivery staff. This prevented the need for a new recruitment process and meant the focus was on getting ready for implementation.

Identifying young people:

Identifying young people for support was also straightforward, as the first cohort were either already accessing overnight short breaks, were in the short breaks system, or who had previously access short breaks but were not currently engaged with a service.

Developing the focus:

The development stage involved further reflections on parent carers' concerns about developing young people's independent living skills after they turn 18. As a wider SEND service, practitioners noticed that some older young people needed additional support with independent living, which led to a hypothesis that some families may find it easier to complete basic tasks for their child at home, rather than supporting them to do so independently.

Empowering young people:

Young people had a say in developing what they wanted from the transition group. Initial sessions involved practitioners asking young people to describe the bespoke support they needed to feel more independent, which helped establish a person-centred culture where young people knew they would be listened to. Each group ended up with a different focus, depending on the young people's wishes and needs.

Key successes

- Young people's engagement with the group, and the relationships they have established with the staff,
- A person-centred approach where support was tailored to young people's needs, and
- The success of hosting the group in a comfortable, familiar environment.

Young people's engagement and relationships with staff: As the young people had previously received or are having overnight short breaks in the care home where the group takes place, or are known to other short breaks services, they had established relationships with the staff. By understanding their needs already, young people could be more easily matched to the group which best suited their personalities and needs, enabling their engagement.

A person-centred approach: As staff members already understood the young people's challenges, histories, and needs before they started attending the group, they were able to ensure they got the most out of the six-week programme, adapting support to each young person's individual journey with independent living.

A comfortable, familiar environment: The overnight short breaks care home had all the necessary amenities and appliances to ensure young people could effectively practise their independent living skills and was familiar to them.

Wakefield intends to develop the transition group by involving young people's parents.

Parents were not invited to attend the group sessions during the first roll-out, which created a missed opportunity for developing independent living skills at home. Wakefield are now planning to extend some sessions to parent carers, so they have the tools to empower their children to live independently after the programme ends.

Key learning for other Local Authorities

The main piece of advice to local authorities who want to develop their preparation for adulthood provision is to utilise pre-existing resources.

This could include:

- Upskilling staff who already work in SEND or short break services, so they are able to run small support groups where the focus is independent living, and
- Running groups in familiar settings which are already used for overnight short breaks and have the correct facilities for practising independent living skills.

Other key areas of learning include instilling a culture of relationship-focused, person-centred practice, building connections with other agencies to help plan logistics, and how to effectively measure young people's progress:

Relationship-focused, person-centred practice:

- To ensure staff members could build strong, trusting relationships with young people at a critical point in their journey to becoming more independent, they were supported to have the right skills and confidence in relationship-based work.
- Empowering young people was critical to this. Young people should be given opportunities to plan out the focus of their group, so they can have a say in what they most need help with.
- Progress will happen at a different pace for each young person. For this reason, it is important to be flexible, understanding that some young people may need additional support beyond the agreed number of sessions.

Connecting with other parts of the SEND system:

- It was important to make connections with leaders working in education and school transport in the initial planning stages, so they could support with setting up the group and recommend other cohorts of young people.
- Building these multiagency connections helps ensure information about young people's needs is shared effectively and means agreement is reached early on about logistics and practicalities, such as how young people will travel to and from the group sessions.

Measuring young people's progress:

- This is key to evidencing the effectiveness of small, focused group work.
- There are different ways of measuring progress. Wakefield recommend:
 - Conducting 'before and after' measurements of young people's independent living skills at the start and end of the programme,
 - Capturing longer-term outcomes through follow-up home visits, and
 - Speaking to young people and their parent carers after the programme has finished.