

Case Study: Person Centred Approaches



The context:

Thornbeck College offers learners with Autism Spectrum Condition the chance to work in vocational settings within a business enterprise. Learners experience all areas of the enterprise and then select an

area of their choice to follow as a pathway for 2 years. Throughout their time at college learners are supported to be self advocates. A person centred approach is central to the ethos of Thornbeck College.

The challenge:

Recent legislation such as the Valuing People Now (2008) calls for equality and choice for people, regardless of ability or disability, which means that learning must be personalised to really meet the needs of learners. The Progression through Partnership (DFES, DH and DWP, 2007) document states that person centred planning is of paramount importance for learners with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities (LLDD) to ensure that individual needs and aspirations are central to learning objectives. The learner needs to be more involved in planning for their own lives and in deciding what they want to learn and why (Clare, 1990). The 'Greater Expectations' (ALI, 2006) document highlights the need for sufficient transition planning at all stages of learning. If a learner does not have an adequate plan for the future whilst they are at college, they are at risk of becoming the 'circular learner' and of meeting society's low expectations by not progressing to appropriate provision or employment. However, as pointed out by Barnes, McCarthy and Comerford (1995) in their report, simply asking learners what they want or need to learn does not always work. Due to historically being "over supported" learners may lack the experiences, skills or confidence to make decisions about their lives. When considering their futures, learners experienced difficulty due to their rigidity of thought and behaviour and their difficulties with imagining anything outside of their immediate routine.

What we did:

- To empower learners they were given the responsibility of setting up a student council and holding weekly meetings. The council enables learners to have choice and to express their opinions on college life. The meetings improve self confidence and assertiveness within the learner group and allow them to own their whole college experience, not just their learning.
- To further facilitate staff in the area of promoting self-advocacy and in meeting learners needs, staff workshops were held to share ideas on supporting learners to make informed decisions about what to learn.
- In order to allow the learners to express their opinions concerning the programme they want to follow, they have scheduled tutorial time once a week in which they can express their aspirations. Learners experience careers visits to see what a job might be like for them. Learners also experience each area of the vocational Learning for Living and Work programme in their first term at the college in order to make an informed choice for their college life.
- Each learner owns an electronically based person-centred learning plan (PCLP) to record their likes, dislikes, aspirations, targets and choices. The plans incorporate E-learning which allows the learners to individualise the aesthetics and the content of their documents.
- In order to ensure learners' future needs are met and to follow the advice from Government policy (Greater Expectations, 2006), Transition Plans have been developed. Upon beginning their programme of learning each learner owns a personalised

Transition Plan. The aim of the Transition Plan is to allow the learner to plan what they want to do in their adult life, including after college. The Transition Plan allows for long term aims to be recorded and feeds in to the PCLP, which allows for the planning of short term aims and targets each term.

The outcomes:

- The Student Council gives the learners a voice to raise issues about college and to be advocates for change. Participating in meetings enables learners to build self confidence and assertiveness and to make choices about their college and their lives.
- Careers visits, tutorials, PCLPs and Transition Plans support learners to make their own choices about their future and their present and to be self advocates in expressing what they want out of life.
- PCLPs and Transition Plans allow learners to specify the support they require to live their lives how they want and to contribute to society.
- PCLPs and Transition Plans enable learners to express themselves with words, pictures symbols and sound.
- PCLPs and Transition Plans can incorporate the views and opinions of learners' circles of support.

The impact:

Learner surveys have captured the impact of the college's Person Centred Approach.

- The student council have made decisions concerning canteen menu options, celebration events, sports and leisure events, free time activities and resources they want to use.
- Learners feel more in control of their college life and have been empowered to speak out and express opinions.
- Learners feel supported by staff to make decisions about their futures.
- Learners enjoy working on Transition Plans and PCLPs and sharing these with their circles of support.
- Thirteen learners have developed PCLPs and Transition Plans to support them to make choices. Eight learners who leave college in August 2009 have shared their plans with their circle of support, who are currently supporting learners to get where they want to be.

References:

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