

How's Your Journey?

A snapshot of the experience of transition of the 2011/12 cohort with additional support needs in Highland



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Abbreviations

YP	Young people
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SW	Social worker
CPN	Community Psychiatric Nurse
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance

Chairperson's Foreword

“As a parent of a 14 year old young man with complex additional support needs, I was very keen to read this report, especially as we move into the new integrated model of service provision and my son will experience his transition out of school and into adult life wholly through this new system. My opinion, which is endorsed by the Joint Transition Policy of the Highland Council and NHS Highland, is that the more complex the additional support needs are for a young person, the earlier the transition planning should begin. Hence I have already started researching various options for my son, including submitting application forms for placements for when he leaves school. Although this could be as far as 4 years away, I have felt it very necessary to do this because of the 2-3 year waiting lists for the placement options that best suit his needs and interests. Quite simply, if the applications are not sent now, these placements will not become realistic options for him at the time when he needs to make decisions. Like any parent, I want my son to see what's out there in plenty of time to help him make the best possible choices for his future. Specialist provision for young people aged 19-25 is not available in abundance in Highland and despite the best intentions of the people around a meeting table, if planning has not begun at the right time and if the right service options are not out there, not everyone will experience the transition into adult life that suits their needs and aspirations. The big question is, will the new integrated service design address this?”

Isabel Paterson
March 2012

Introduction

The term 'transition' is used to describe a significant change in one's life. Leaving school and moving into adult life is an exciting and challenging time for all young people. There are many changes, and lots of choices to make about the future. They must adapt to physical and emotional development which is reflected in their leisure and relationship choices, their independence and plans for their future. When young people have additional support needs this transition also includes the move from children's to adult's services.

Within services providing education, health and social care transition involves moving from children's services into adult services, where the young person will usually be expected have more autonomy and independent choice. The transition for young people who require on-going support into adulthood happens at one of the most vulnerable times of their lives.

Transition should be a planned and co-ordinated process of preparation, rather than just a simple transfer. Ideally this happens in a planned, co-ordinated way with all concerned able to collaborate fully to achieve the YP's wishes.

In December 2010 the Board of NHS Highland and Members of Highland Council agreed to commit to planning for the integration of health, education and social care services. Integrated teams are felt to be more effective in that they 'can make decisions more quickly, allowing a more flexible and responsive service to users'. www.highlandlife.net

Under the new arrangements, which are in place from April 2012, the single lead agency for adult care is NHS Highland and the single lead agency for children's services is Highland Council. As successful transition involves the close collaboration of both adult and children's service workers with the young person involved, and the adult and children's service workers will be led by two different agencies, it was felt that a baseline of the experience of those currently journeying through this phase of their lives was needed. This would provide a snapshot of current experience and also provide a reference by which to measure the future transition experiences of Highland children with additional support needs. This report is an interim one prior to a more detailed consultation planned for 2013/14.

It is recognised that the results of this consultation are limited by its scale. It provides only a snapshot in time of what is a lengthy process and is further limited by the small number of young people involved —there were some additional needs (e.g. sensory impairments) not represented at all in this particular cohort.



Method

The brief was that the consultation conversations were to be held with YP between 15 and 19 years who had left school last summer or were leaving during this educational year.

Three areas were selected to ensure that the sample was geographically representative of the urban and rural regions of the Highlands. The YP were identified through the 16+ co-ordinators within the secondary schools serving the areas, through the social work disability team leaders, through Activity Agreement co-ordinators, through Barnardos workers and through specialist nurses to ensure that as many as possible who met the criteria were identified.

A total of 43 invitations to take part were sent out, though it is possible that some young people will have received information from more than one service, so the total number of young people invited is probably less than this. 10 acceptances ensued and these were consulted.

The brief was that the conversations were to be led by the young people—without reference to a specific question set. This was achieved, though for the purposes of analysis it was necessary to identify themes which recur across the conversations.

The young people have each received a copy of the transcript of their conversation to check that condensing in the interests of brevity had not altered the meaning.

The evidence in the report is in 2 sections. The first section consists of an account of each young person's experience as reported by them.

This section is followed by quotations from the young people, collected into themes and an analysis of the testimony.

The names of the young people have been substituted with a fictitious name.



Summary

For many YP the process of transition is fitting seamlessly with other life considerations and events and the transition from children's to adult services is just part of the bigger transition from childhood to adulthood common to all adolescents.

Most of the young people were receiving verbal information with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and social work seeming to be foremost in providing this. Some young people felt that there was a lack of information and that more would be helpful. None of the young people was using the 'My Transition Guide' (2008), though there was evidence of other documentation being used by two of the YP.

There was dissatisfaction with meetings felt by four of the YP, but their experience seems to have been very negative indeed. Though there were some positive comments about meetings - that they were helpful in focusing young people's ideas - the overwhelming view is negative.

They seemed to be a particular source of frustration, particularly the lack of structure, that many were unproductive, that they were unable to make decisions due to either lack of sufficient personnel present or lack of personnel with sufficient authority. This all contributed to a lack of progress. There was also seen to be some disregard for YP's views.

Professionals who consulted the young people and listened to them and respected their individual needs and wishes were particularly mentioned, as were the ones who gave them options and choice.

There was some concern that there is still a tendency to label and stereotype resulting in a service that is not tailored to individual needs, wishes and circumstances.

YP voiced concerns that there was some lack of continuity with good staff moving on leaving them anxious about replacements and continuity of service

As with previous research (*Recipe for Young Parenthood HCF 2012*) the quality of the experience of services depends very much on the quality of the individual service personnel delivering it. Particularly valued are the service workers who are supportive and helpful, even when it is beyond their remit e.g. the social worker who gives lifts and the support worker who does '*whatever- gym, swim, walk on the beach*'



Jessica's journey

Jessica is 16 years old. She left school in Autumn term 2011. This was unplanned. Just prior to this she had had a long spell of absence due to health issues and felt that she had too much to catch up on to make it worth staying. Her attendance has been inconsistent throughout her school-life as she has an on-going medical condition. School had tried to support her by sending work but when she is unwell she doesn't feel up to it.

What Jessica likes doing

She enjoys going to the cinema, into town and socialising with friends.

What she is doing now

Jessica has an activity agreement. She is doing activity agreement/work experience placements which she is enjoying very much.

She is leaving foster care and is in the process of transferring from children's to adult social work.

What she wants to do

Her plans have had to be modified because her medical condition has made her school attendance so intermittent that she hasn't been able to achieve the grades she would have needed. She is hoping to do a qualification through distance learning as this could be fitted around her medical appointments and needs.

Information

Her SDS worker is getting information about college courses for her.

She doesn't really know what is happening about leaving care. *'I don't really know what's going on, social work haven't told me'*

'Its been my own ideas, I wouldn't do anything I didn't want to do'

...its been confusing and there are some issues with EMA' (Educational Maintenance Allowance)

People

'(SDS keyworker) has been great' - Jessica's SDS worker has organised work experience-type placements as part of her activity agreement. Jessica was very positive about his contribution 'He has been really good and helpful.....he set everything up. I am glad of him as I didn't want to just sit around the house' 'I would have tried to get a job but it's not easy and it wouldn't be easy as I have [medical] appointments all the time'

The staff in her work experience are encouraging and supportive.

She still has a children's social worker and is getting an adult services social worker but doesn't know who or when yet.

She used to have 2 support workers (social work) who took her out 2 or 3 times a week; this stopped when she left hospital.

Jessica felt her social worker would be able to help her if she had any questions about transition.

Meetings

Jessica felt that meetings were pointless as she always felt that there were no options available to her. She also felt disempowered, as if decisions were taken irrespective of her views and wishes.

People did not listen at meetings in the past but now she is older it's improved.

'It feels like every time I go to meetings they had already decided so there was no point going' 'If it's a good meeting I get what I need. I don't like it when other people get to decide about my life'

There is a meeting planned to discuss her transition from care to independent living.

What would be helpful

Someone to talk to at school would have been helpful. *'Someone to give you the options would have been helpful – I did like school, I just had a lot of absences'*

'There is not much information – more information would be helpful'



Laura's journey

Laura has a physical disability. She is 18 years old and at school.

What Laura likes doing

Laura enjoys playing a musical instrument. She enjoys socialising, though this is difficult in her geographical area. She has friends around home, mostly school friends but it is not possible to go out often as public transport is not accessible, taxis are expensive so she has to rely on her parents. She enjoys arts and crafts- making things.

What Laura is doing now

Laura is at school and studying for Highers

What Laura wants to do

Laura would like to go to university. She has started planning for this with social work. They are supportive but concerned about financing it. *'They are keen but have one eye on the budget'*

Social work are trying to encourage distance learning so that Laura can stay at home as they won't finance overnight care, but Laura is keen to gain her independence and feels that being away at university affords more opportunities than just academic ones. *'It's a bit of a battle but a lot of people are on our side'*

She has visited universities to assess how accessible they are and is finding that they are being very supportive and encouraging.

Information

Laura has had information from social workers, though no written information. Her mum had a large file of information relating to transition from the national support charity relating to her specific condition. This was given to her a couple of years ago. This society has been helpful in a practical way (e.g. providing template letters for funding). Laura was not familiar with the My Transition Guide and when shown it didn't think she would have used it as the layout and graphics didn't appeal to her.

People

Laura feels her immediate family are giving her most help as she makes plans to move from school.

She had the same input from SDS at school as all her contemporaries had.

Guidance teacher was helpful.

School are being supportive in principle. *[School are] 'being helpful but not as much as they could be doing'*

'Social work have not been too helpful as yet but we are hopeful' She transferred recently from children's SW to adult SW; *'the adult social worker was quite negative to begin with but is coming round'*.

They haven't really needed much help up to now – its only been in the recent past that she has had care and they have really only tapped into it as transition was looming.

SW say her situation is *'new territory but don't really make much effort to find out'*

Laura is still under children's services for most of her medical needs, though she is already adult services for occupational therapy. She is resigned to this as *'there has never been any consistency with occupational therapy'*.

Children's physiotherapy wanted to pass her to adult services when she leaves school but then she hopes to be going to university within weeks so doesn't see the point of being with a different physiotherapist just for that few weeks.

Meetings

Laura felt that there were far more meetings than were necessary and that attendance at some meetings was counter-productive as she had to miss school time to attend.

There are not clear objectives for meetings and they feel unproductive .

' People at meetings can't make decisions, the higher-ups who can make decisions don't come to meetings'

'There is lots of time and money wasted having lots of meetings and ticking boxes'

'People don't know who is responsible for things any more - this causes confusion at meetings'.

Wheelchair clinic took place some months ago to review her before she moves away as a replacement wheelchair takes months and anecdotally she had heard that adult services were even slower.

What would be helpful

Laura is on the whole happy with how it's going but *'the uni .side needs organising'*



Andrew's journey

Andrew is aged 17 years. He left school in summer 2011. He has a specific learning difficulty, identified in primary school; support was put in place and maintained through the rest of his school life.

What Andrew likes doing

Andrew likes going out, facebook, texting, x-box, computer, cycling, going into town, and doing his part-time casual job.

What Andrew is doing now

Andrew attends college on a full-time vocational course. He is enjoying the course, particularly the practical aspects. He is happy with the theory elements now that his support is in place. He feels that college have responded well to his needs.

What Andrew wants to do

He wants a job doing what he is studying on his vocational course, and is weighing up whether to continue studying or to apply for an apprenticeship and feels that he is being supported in this decision. He has always been interested in it and welcomed the chance to *'have a go at it to be sure I wanted to do it'*

Information

Andrew is happy with the amount of information he has had throughout transition, and is currently getting at college. He received information from Careers Scotland in school. He also had a taster programme of 1 day per week in college in the lead-up to leaving school so that he could be sure that he was making the right decision.

People

He had the same 2 careers advisors throughout and has occasionally bumped into them informally, and they have enquired how he is getting on. Everyone he has dealt with has been generally helpful and supportive.

Meetings

Andrew had *'a couple of meetings of half an hour or so'* with Careers Scotland. There was *'nothing not to like'* –they were helpful.

What would be helpful

Andrew felt that he had had a positive experience and could offer no suggestions to improve the process. He felt that *'leaving school was the best bit'*



Carl's journey

Carl is aged 17 years. He has learning support needs. He is at school and is due to leave in the summer.

What Carl likes doing

Carl had a poster that he had made showing what he likes doing. He likes swimming and has a variety of musical interests. He likes watching TV and playing computer games and enjoys meeting people and visiting family.

What Carl is doing now.

Carl is in school at the moment and goes to college on 1 day a week, with his mum in the car. He meets his friends at college. He is doing a Duke of Edinburgh Award and goes out with some friends as part of the award.

What Carl wants to do

Carl doesn't know what he is going to do when he leaves school, but he says his mum and dad talk to him about it. He wants to work in a restaurant in the nearby small town.

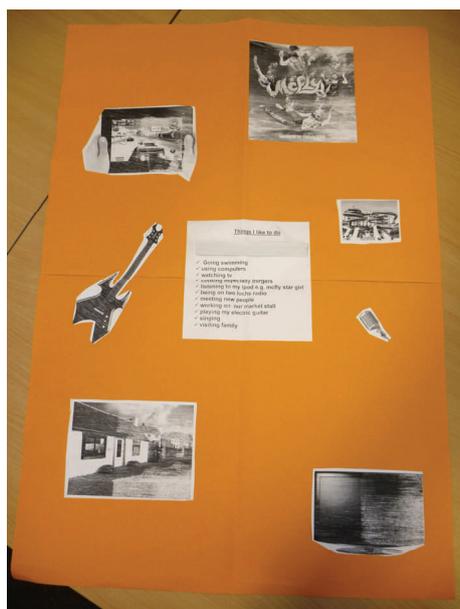
Information

Carl had a copy of "My Career Plan" with him. He had also taken it home to show his mum.

People

Carl said that (16+ co-ordinator) and (Learning Support Teacher) help him in school '*(they give) lots of help, (they) listen to you*'

His doctor and his mum help him with information about health.



Liam's journey

Liam left school in summer 2011. He is aged 19 years with a physical disability.

What Liam likes doing

Liam is a keen musician. His music interests, and activities keep him very busy and he doesn't need or want anything else - he finds his music affords him lots of opportunities to expand his horizons and to socialise.

What Liam is doing now

Liam has an Activity Agreement at the moment. He feels that the system needs some tweaking as it has a negative impact on his family's benefits, and they are consequently much worse off. *'Nobody seems to know about it and understand it'*

If Liam got employment he would not be eligible for an Activity Agreement and it is the Activity Agreement that is covering the cost of his music study (leading to exams which are vital for his future plans).

What Liam wants to do

Liam wants to pursue a music career. He has had this ambition since childhood and as he has got older and his talent developed it has become more of a reality. He is hoping to pass his music exams at the end of this 2 years of self-study, that will enable him to go to college.

Information

Liam had downloaded a 'My Transition Guide'. His Mum had been on-line and downloaded it independently. She had also found what she thought was the *CHIP+ guide to transition ('It's My Choice'). Liam had not received any written information from professionals. SDS were the most useful, getting information, and encouraging Liam to discuss his hopes for his future.

People

Liam thought the careers service were very good. He saw the SDS worker in school as part of the timetable, as did everyone else initially, but he saw her more often as moving on became imminent. SDS encouraged Liam to discuss his plans and he felt that they listened to him and respected his views and wishes.

The SDS worker admitted that she didn't know anything about what Liam wanted to do but said she would find out. Liam expected that she would consider his plan to be a pipe-dream (as Guidance teacher had) and didn't expect her to do this, however she did and provided useful information and support. Once Liam had left school he was transferred to another SDS worker. Liam would have preferred the continuity of keeping the same one.

Social work apologised at Liam's transition meeting for the lack of care he had received as a child. This honesty and transparency endeared him to Liam and his family.

* CHIP+ - Children in the Highlands Information Point. CHIP+ offers information, support and advice to the families and carers of children and young people with additional support needs, and to professionals who work with them.

Who helps with health

Liam has a new consultant in adult services who has been '*brilliant.*' She has asked him what he wants and has given him the opportunity to consider various options for specific aspects of his care.

He feels that this sort of approach should be introduced earlier as it increases independence. She referred him to physiotherapy and the physiotherapist has asked him what he hopes to achieve, tailoring a programme around his desire for one which could be achieved independently.

Meetings

He found his meetings with SDS useful as they enabled him to focus his ideas.

The main transition meeting was quite positive with children's social work handing over to adult social work .

What would be helpful

More communication between children's services, adult services and the YP would be helpful and more meetings with everybody concerned present as this would facilitate progress.

He feels that the eligibility criteria for child benefit should be circumstances, not age in the case of a YP with a disability, as he feels he is dependent to the same extent as a child.

He almost feels pressured to abandon his plans and go to college straight away to '*get away and relieve the family pressure.*' He feels the geography of the Highlands is not understood and that transport costs are not factored into the planning and the benefits.



Duncan's journey

Duncan is aged 17 years, and left school last Summer.

What Duncan likes doing

Duncan is very keen on his music and plays a number of instruments and sings. He is self taught and also enjoys writing poetry.

In his leisure time he keeps himself to himself as he doesn't have a lot of friends.

What Duncan is doing now

He is currently unemployed and looking for work, *'looking for anything that pays'* though a bad experience in fast food retail has made him wary of work in that sector.

He is doing a course to increase his literacy skills. He has completed part of a course, which was cut short by a short spell of employment and plans to resume it when he feels more focused on what he needs from it.

He has tried to get on an Access to Construction course but was unsuccessful. He has also tried to get an apprenticeship but *'no-one is looking for apprentices at the moment'*.

What Duncan wants to do

His dream is to play in a band but is realistic about his chances. Ideally he would like to work as a joiner as he enjoys working with wood. He wants a job, more friends, someone he knows loves him.

Information

At school he had some information from the Guidance teacher but feels that she was *'a bit useless'* due to the large number of young people she had. *'A woman spoke to me a couple of times at school from SDS. They were more helpful than Guidance'*

He has since gone to SDS himself, motivated by an incident which made him realise that he needed to turn his life round. *'I was in a rut – it was either give up or do something'* He knew about 'The Greenhouse' (SDS's base) from his girlfriend.

He visits the Job Centre but has never actually spoken to anyone there– he just uses the computers.

People

Guidance got him in touch with a counsellor, as he was bullied at school to the point of self-harming and feeling suicidal.

What would be helpful

Duncan feels it would have been better if he had left school with a definite plan. *'I hated school and left at the first opportunity and 2 months later regretted it'*

Lucy's journey

Lucy is aged 17 years and has left care. She left mainstream school in 2008, and has since attended small units. School was tried again, unsuccessfully, in 2009.

What Lucy is doing now

Lucy is doing a course to improve her literacy skills. She is also doing work to *'raise awareness of mental health issues, trying to break stereotypes'*. She feels that young people have to *'learn through making mistakes and pushing the boundaries-you can't expect kids to not push boundaries'*. Whilst they may not listen to adults they will listen to a peer who has been through similar experiences to their own and learnt from them. *'My mistakes have had a positive effect on my sister'*. She feels that being a role- model and working in a mentoring situation would be something she would be good at.

What Lucy wants to do

She really wants to work with children and young people, and is hoping to do a distance learning Childcare course, as she feels she would not cope with a classroom situation. She feels that she could work with care-leavers as she understands them and they would relate to her. *'I am determined to work with kids – I feel I have got a lot to offer and children's needs and rights are very important to me'*

Information

Lucy has done much work experience/voluntary work with children and young people in a variety of educational and social care settings, so that she is sure it is what she wants to do.

People

Barnardos is very supportive *'my support worker does whatever – swim, gym, walk on the beach'*

Barnardos and SDS have been helpful. Over the years she has had a counsellor and a CPN. She also had a *'leaving care worker'* but did not meet her soon enough and felt ill-prepared when the time came to leave care.

What would be helpful

It would have been helpful to have had a staged, gradual introduction to independent living. *'You need to build up from care accommodation into your own flat – a couple of nights a week to begin with. They need to find ways to move kids out more slowly. You struggle so much with all the other stuff. You need Careers, Barnardos, budget advice etc- you need support BEFORE you leave care, a rough plan of action. In the event there is nothing to do, no-one to ask'*.

Katy's journey

Katy is aged 18 years. She has learning support needs. Katy is at school and is due to leave in summer 2012.

What Katy likes doing

Katy had a poster that she had made showing what she likes doing and was eager to discuss it. She likes working in the pub in evenings, cleaning glasses and folding napkins.

She also enjoys helping people. She likes helping her mum with the shopping and pushes the trolley.

She likes animals, her dogs, and riding and grooming ponies; she has friends at the stables.

She enjoys baking cakes.

What Katy is doing now.

She is at school and goes to college on one day per week.

What Katy wants to do

She wants to work in a pub.

Information

Katy had a "My Career Plan" which she was working through and clearly enjoyed doing. Katy also had an activity agreement leaflet in her bag.

People

At school she is helped by (16+ Co-ordinator) and (Learning Support teacher). Her doctor and her mum help her with information about health.

Education /Training

Katy says she is going to college, but she is not sure who is going to help her when she has left. She is going to help the tutors at college and she already has 'lots of friends' there (a number named). *'I'm going to be going out a lot – I like going out'*
16+ co-ordinator and Learning Support teacher talk to her about college and she says they have been there with her.

Meetings

Katy enjoys meetings when she can make her poster and write in her career plan. She likes talking to the people who help her. They have *'all been helpful and polite'*

Gemma's journey

Gemma is aged 18 years. She left school in summer 2011.

What Gemma likes doing

She describes herself as not very outgoing. She likes to read and play computer games, draw and write. She likes to speak to close friends but doesn't like big groups.

She wants a purpose for her leisure and wants everything she does to be useful.

What Gemma is doing now.

Gemma has an Activity Agreement and is studying for a Higher and a course at college. She feels that the Activity Agreement is beneficial but that more need to know about them - she has encountered professionals who are unfamiliar with them.

What Gemma wants to do.

She ideally wants to do a job to reflect her environmental interests. *'I am not too ambitious, I just want to be able to pay the bills, doing something I enjoy – a steady existence. Doing something I enjoy with not too much human interaction. I am happier with things rather than people.....I like sorting things, it's very therapeutic. Today we talked about these plans and about where to get work experience'*.

Information

Gemma knows of the 'My Transition Guide' but she has found it neither useful or helpful because she has no access to hers; her social worker has it on computer. She has done the 'My World Triangle' but cannot remember the circumstances. .

'Most of what I need has come from school and the social worker- she is brilliant.' She gives Gemma lifts so that she avoids the awkwardness she feels on public transport. This ensures that Gemma attends appointments. Gemma was unimpressed by careers advice in school and felt that the reliance on web-pages was no better than what she could do for herself.

For information Gemma would go to her social worker *'She lets me know who to contact and gives me phone numbers'*

For information about health matters her Mum knows who to talk to or she would go to her social worker.

People

Gemma's social worker is fairly new and is leaving in the summer; Gemma is upset about this. Gemma is not sure how that will work with transition as she will move into adult services and is not clear how she will move on from CAMHS.

'There have been lots of temporary social workers (students, reliefs etc) but only this one who has actually done anything.'

'You need one person you can trust and go to' Gemma's social worker is that person for her. Guidance teacher in school has been good. She was understanding and initiated extra time for Gemma to complete work, and signposted her to other help.

'(After transition) I need someone similar who I can just phone e.g. for life obstacles, forms etc – someone not patronising'.

Gemma thinks not being patronising, being logical and understanding are important qualities. It is important to be able to ask things without fear of ridicule or being made to feel '*I should know that already*' as Gemma feels that '*everyone starts somewhere*' and young people have all had different experiences and therefore different starting points

Meetings

Gemma has had a number of meetings but today was the first meeting that she feels had a positive outcome. '*It feels like too many as nothing really happens*' '*Up to today I was disenchanted but I feel happier now*' The Activity Agreement co-ordinator had attended today and been very pro-active.

At today's meeting she felt they had listened to her. The social worker was helpful and remembered something that Gemma had told her earlier- she was able to bring this up at the meeting to be actioned by the appropriate person.

The social worker prompts the others. Gemma felt that many meetings were lacking structure, with no aims and outcomes, just resulting in another meeting. At many meetings people undertake to look into something and '*it never happens*'. She felt that the personnel with the authority to take a decision should be at meetings, and would result in fewer meetings.

What would be helpful

Gemma felt that there should be more information readily available about life skills to help young people who felt daily life challenging or needed help overcoming personal obstacles, and presented in a variety of ways e.g. booklets and helplines that didn't necessitate a personal approach.

She felt that more awareness of different and flexible approaches to continuing education would be helpful and that more input by the young people to identify where they felt they needed more support would improve the process.



Ruth's journey

Ruth has a physical disability She is aged 17 years and at school .

What Ruth likes doing

Ruth is very sociable and loves being with people. Socialising is very important to her although this has been a difficulty for her as social opportunities are limited because of her disabilities. She tried to do something about it (starting her own group) but needs help from services and she has found this lacking. *'Going out takes a lot of organising – transport, accessibility, carers, it all needs careful planning'*. She likes doing *'what other teenage girls want to do – fashion, make-up, facebook'*

What Ruth is doing now

Ruth receives tuition and is studying for a Higher. She feels it is important to get grades. She is realistic and doesn't want to do things that she knows would be beyond her, she just wants opportunities to fulfil her potential.

What Ruth wants to do

She wants to go to university or college and live independently with as normal a life as possible. She has talked about her plans with her adult social worker and filled in forms and discussed the kind of care support she would need. She feels that the social worker and her advocate are listening in discussing her future plans, helping and supporting. Ruth feels that her day-to-day struggles make it difficult to think about the future.

Information

Ruth did not have a 'My Transition Guide' or equivalent, and did not recall having seen one. She didn't recall getting information except being told it was time to start thinking about transition.

People

Ruth is still involved with children's services but adult service workers have started to come to her meetings.

Ruth's social worker had instigated the transition process. She had got an adult social worker involved . However both are now leaving. She says that the SW from adult services was *'just getting comfortable (with her) and now she's leaving'* She says that *'both know everything pretty well, but they are to be replaced with two new ones – the situation's not the best'*

Teachers haven't been very inclusive, *'some things they wanted me to do made me look a bit silly and I didn't want to embarrass myself'*

She has help from a mentor. She feels that contacts with services are not tailored to her individual needs; that they assume that they know what is needed because they know her diagnosis.

Meetings and planning

Ruth is doing planning around what her hopes and dreams are and what she needs to achieve them.

'There are so many different people'. She finds that often the talk is constructive but then this is not translated into action. *'I don't know what the answer is, maybe they think someone else is doing it, or they forget, or don't know how to sort the issue. This is a theme throughout – you agree on points and at the next meeting nothing has changed – same thing all over again'* She states that she is *'disenchanted with meetings, I have lost trust in people, they have let me down. I am sure people have the best intentions but it gets lost. I have learnt never to get my hopes up'*

Ruth has herself set up a meeting with people she wants, who she feels care and are helpful, so that she knows where she is going with her life and can get a plan.

'...how we can make it happen, and not just talk about it – this is continuing'

'All services do is talk and things are left until the last minute e.g. exams' – it took so much time to organise what support she needed that she had little time or energy for preparation and revision.

She felt that there was a lack of urgency on the part of services and that they were not sensitive to the fact that the young person was anxiously waiting for some progress.

What would be helpful

'I just want services to understand and listen and make changes – I'm not looking to blame'

'You need adult and children's social worker to work effectively together and keep in close contact'

Ruth felt that more consistency of staff was needed.. *'Getting to know someone different is yet another person in your life – you lose some privacy in your life – keep contacts to a minimum'*. She felt that the empathy, understanding and commitment of the professionals was important.

Ruth felt that it would help to have more information in advance.



Analysis

Of the 10 consulted there were 6 female and 4 male. There was one 16 year old , five 17 year olds, three 18 year olds and one 19 year old.

4 were still at school, though 1 was on a part-time timetable, 3 were on activity agreements, 1 was on a full-time college course, 2 were attending a Barnardos literacy group.

8 were living at home, 2 were leaving care—1 in foster care and gradually moving back home, 1 having left care and in a flat.

The young people all had additional support needs with one or more of a combination of physical support needs, learning support needs, and needing 'More Choices, More Chances'. This latter group included young people who had been persistently absent from school, were not in education or training, had mental health problems, or were looked after and accommodated.

What young people said they like doing

The ten young people had a wide range of interests and abilities encompassing social, crafts, technological, sport and musical interests, and part-time casual jobs. Two expressing the view that their additional needs affected their ability to pursue their interests, though one conceded that this was also to do with the geography of where she lives. (though this wouldn't be an issue if she didn't have a disability). 'Going out takes a lot of organising – transport, accessibility, carers, it all needs careful planning'.

What young people said they are doing now

All but two were in some form of structured education/training activity. Four were still at school and one was full-time at college, with three on Activity Agreements. Two were doing a 6 week literacy course and were trying to organise either employment or training for the future.

What young people said they want to do

Of the ten, six were working towards some definite future plan and three had only vague plans. One did not know what he was going to do when he left school, however this is possibly due to limits of his understanding rather than there being no plan in place.



What young people said about transition

Lots of people say you fall into a black hole between children's services and adult services – its really scary. You feel in no-mans land – you don't know where you are- its not a nice time

You struggle so much with all the issues - you need Careers, Barnardos, budget help etc—you need support before you leave care and a rough plan of action.

Its important to consider personal circumstances - see the person as a whole person—see all circumstances in context.

Suddenly at 18 you find yourself needing independence skills that you could have coped with earlier if they had been introduced earlier

Leaving school was the best bit

Its swings and roundabouts – what you lose from children’s services you gain in adult services

Up to now no-one has ever actually listened and never understood. It was very frustrating to repeat the same thing over and over to each different person

There is some suggestion that transition is not always the phased and gradual process of increasing independence and autonomy that it should be and in at least one case there has been a sudden expectation of independence skills at the point of transfer.

Children and young people are used to a continuous process of change, adaptation and development as they grow up and so seemed to be accepting of transition as just part of this process as long as it progresses smoothly. Consequently some of the young people spoken to seemed to have little awareness of transition as a process.

This is positive as it suggests that in many cases the process is fitting seamlessly with other life considerations and events and the transition from children’s to adult services is just part of the bigger transition from childhood to adulthood common to all adolescents.



What young people said about information

Transition Guide not really useful, not that helpful.

Most of what I need (information) I got from school and social work

Activity Agreement is really useful—it needs more awareness (more people to know they are available)

Its been my own ideas, I wouldn't do anything I didn't want to do

...its been confusing and there are some issues with EMA.

Each of the young people was shown a copy of the 'My Transition Guide' It was familiar to two of the young people; it had been downloaded by Liam's mother and Gemma knew that her social worker had it on computer but she herself had no access to it. None of the young people was using it. On being shown it Laura commented that it was not the kind of thing that would appeal to her as she felt that the layout and graphics looked patronising.

Carl and Katy were using 'My Career Plan' and Laura's mother had got a Transition Guide from the support organisation for her specific condition. Liam's mother had also downloaded the CHIP+ Guide.

Most of the young people were receiving verbal information with SDS and social work seeming to be foremost in providing this.

Some young people felt that there was a lack of information and that more would be helpful.

What young people said about meetings

Its been a theme throughout....agree on points and at the next meeting nothing has changed, same thing all over again.

(It would be better) if there were less meetings but more productive. There aren't clear objectives for meetings

....so many meetings when I should be in school....Lots of time and money wasted having lots of meetings and ticking boxes.

(There are) lots of meetings, feels like too many as nothing really happens.

2 meetings should sort it out : 1 to plan and decide who to involve and another to bring in the useful people who can over-see everything and make decisions etc.

Lots of meetings lead nowhere except another meeting.... You need to achieve a goal otherwise there is no point having a meeting.

Good meetings are when stuff happens

There is often constructive talk which time and again never happens. It makes you lose faith

There was nothing not to like—they (meetings) were helpful

People at the meetings can't make decisions. Higher-ups who can make decisions don't come to the meetings.

It feels like every time I go to meetings they had already decided so there was no point going . If it's a good meeting I get what I need. I don't like it when other people get to decide about my life

People don't know who is responsible for things any more- this causes confusion at meetings.

One person who can oversee everything would be good

People didn't turn up for meetings or they made an excuse not to make a decision or action something on the grounds that they needed a higher authority

(at meetings) ...a lot just sat and said nothing or were defensive – they were not very proactive

Though some YP appear to have more meetings than others, presumably relative to the complexity of their circumstances, the view was that there are more meetings than are necessary and that more efficiency at meetings could reduce the frequency.

Though there were sometimes constructive suggestions at meetings, these were not followed through into actions. So that having agreed actions, by the next meeting there had been no progress and therefore that meeting became a repeat performance. Meetings did not have clear objectives so that they lacked structure and were unproductive.

Some young people had the impression that meetings were attended by people with not enough authority to take decisions, and that the need to get a higher authority to make a decision or give advice increased the time it took to make progress, and there was a suspicion that this stated need to get a higher authority was sometimes used as an excuse.

Some young people reported feeling disempowered and that decisions were taken irrespective of their views and wishes or that the decisions had already been taken and the meeting was used to present the fait accompli. This is clearly not in accordance with the Joint Transitions Policy which states:- *'Transitions planning will at all times promote ownership of the process by those most affected, by planning with the person - not for the person'* Joint Transitions Policy Highland Council/NHS Highland 2008

One young person was so disenchanted with meetings that she had set up her own with the people she wants, who she feels care and are helpful.

It is not clear whether meetings are being recorded but the 'My Transition Guide' and its documentation are clearly not being used.

Though there were some positive comments about meetings - that they were helpful in focussing young peoples ideas - the overwhelming view is negative, with four of the ten YP having had very negative experiences. The main issues seemed to be the lack of structure and lack of progress, the non-attendance by key people and the disregard for YP's views.

What young people said about people

Just doing their job—the ones we see can't sanction anything

I've lost trust in people—they have let me down. I am sure people have the best intentions but it gets lost. I have learnt never to get my hopes up.

The social worker from adult services is lovely ...just getting comfortable with her and she's leaving.

(I was) told by my social worker it was time for transition.. got involved with the adult social worker...my (children's service) SW left it more to the adult SW both are now leaving.

Lots of temporary social workers, reliefs and students, only one has actioned anything.

(Guidance teacher) was a bit useless — she was trying to get rid of me—she had 150 other kids so she did the best she could

He (SDS worker) has been really good and helpful. He helped me to get information and work experience. He set everything up. I am glad of him as I didn't want to just sit around the house

She (SDS worker) respected and believed in me, but encouraged me to have a back-up plan

Social worker is the one person you can trust and go to. She helps with everything, even life things. She lets me know who to talk to, gives me phone numbers

Young people, predictably, had lots to say about the people they encountered during transition. These people are party to very detailed, sometimes intimate, knowledge about the young people. The desire to have professionals with 'empathy, understanding and commitment' voiced by one and implied during most of the conversations, is therefore understandable.

There were some concerns about lack of continuity, with young people reporting that staff they saw as good were leaving—this seemed to generate much anxiety as to whether replacement individuals would provide the same level of service. The YP recognised that the quality of the individuals dictated the quality of their experience.

There was also a view that professionals still had a tendency to label and deal with the stereotype rather than the individual and some YP consequently felt that they were not getting a service tailored to their individual needs and wishes.

Professionals who consulted the young people and listened to them and respected their wishes were particularly mentioned, as were the ones who gave them options and choice.

What young people said about services

The others, (I) don't know if they listen—they are not as good at listening (as social worker)

(I) went from care to my own flat just like that. (I) didn't meet leaving care worker soon enough.

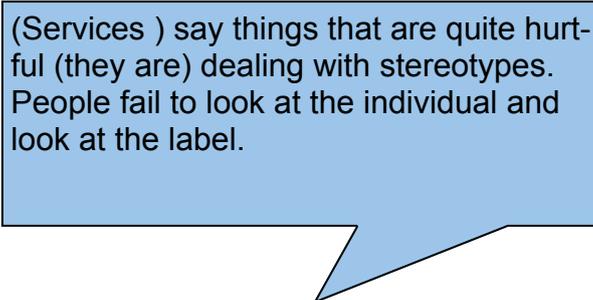
If I want to talk about my future I wouldn't go to services but to my advocate or adult social worker

It can be months and still nothing has happened. It might not seem long to them but when you are waiting it can seem like forever

Those at the top don't really understand about what effect their decisions have on you at the bottom. They don't really understand that it's a battle – you don't want it to be a battle. I want people to understand

All (services) do is talk and leave things 'til the last minute.

Careers (in school) were rubbish, every meeting just pages from the web-site—just the same thing, nothing done, no point—I could do that myself.



(Services) say things that are quite hurtful (they are) dealing with stereotypes. People fail to look at the individual and look at the label.

SDS were regarded very positively, being helpful in securing work experience placements, setting up activity agreements, finding information in new situations, respecting views and wishes, tailoring provision to individual needs. All but 3 mentioned SDS; some had had the standard school input, whereas others had had extensive, on-going contact. In almost all cases satisfaction was high.

Social work, inevitably, seems to be a service with a high profile in transition experiences. There was concern from some young people that they are experiencing a high turnover of social workers, including temporary/relief and student social workers. As social workers seem fundamental to the transition process this is inevitably causing some anxiety to the YP concerned.

There was a feeling that social workers were constrained by financial considerations from supporting YP in what they really wanted and tried to steer them into less costly options e.g. distance learning from home rather than residing at university.

The YP seem more aware of the transfer from children's services to adult services in social work than in any other service, with many of the YP commenting that both were attending their meetings.

School and Guidance teachers were generally considered helpful and understanding, though one YP felt that the service they offered was poor as they were overwhelmed by the number of YP on their caseload.

2 of the YP were leaving care and yet only one of them mentioned specific support for this, saying that she was introduced to the leaving care worker too late.

Few of the YP mentioned health services, though Liam was very positive about the consultant and physiotherapist he now has in adult services, appreciating the level of choice and options he is being offered. This contrasted sharply with his experience in children's services and he feels he could have been given more independence of choice earlier.

Services had mixed reports. As with previous research (*Recipe for Young Parenthood HCF 2012*) the quality of experience depends very much on the quality of the individual service personnel delivering it. Particularly valued are the service workers who take a more holistic view; who are supportive and helpful, even when it is beyond their remit e.g. the social worker who gives lifts and the support worker who does '*whatever- gym, swim, walk on the beach*'

Conclusion

Though this was a small study it represents a range of YP with a range of needs. However their experiences of transition showed some striking similarities.

Some of the young people spoken to seemed to have little awareness of transition as a process where it was progressing smoothly. Where there does seem to be more awareness of transition is where they have dissatisfaction or they perceive that things are going wrong.

Views of services in general, and social work and SDS in particular were on the whole positive, with individuals within SDS and children's social work receiving very favourable reports. That few of the YP mentioned health services is surprising given the range of additional needs of the YP in the consultation and the amount of adjustment the YP have to make in terms of managing their own conditions as an adult. It may be that the transfer is proceeding seamlessly or that the issues around training and employment dominate for these young people.

The quality of service the YP are receiving seems very much dependent on the quality of individuals providing it. It seems very unfair that service quality is down to the lottery of the individual to whose case-load you are allocated.

Though, under the terms of the Additional Support for Learning Act (2004) and of GIRFEC authorities must seek and take account of their views, YP do not always feel that this is happening.

On the whole the dissatisfactions expressed around transition were largely with meetings, communication and information within services and with the YP, and these dissatisfactions seemed to be many and various. It is not clear how well co-ordinated agencies had been; some YP reported meetings attended by a wide representation of agencies whereas others didn't comment.

It is hoped that the new integrated structure will help to ameliorate this issue.

It must be remembered that though there may be a lack of urgency on the part of services there is a young person's whole future at stake and they are anxiously awaiting some progress.

Some of the YP's comments seemed quite despairing and it is sad to think that these YP who are on the threshold of adulthood and should be eagerly anticipating it are experiencing such depths. Transition should not be an uphill battle, and should not contribute to this despair.



What young people said would be helpful

Keep contacts to a minimum. Getting to know someone different is yet another person in your life—you lose some privacy in your life.

It's key that somebody knows you, has empathy with you and really wants to get it right for you.

Maybe a list of sources of information – people to contact for different things, queries too

An instant apprenticeship, something to move into. A toe-hold instead of climbing the mountain without any gear.

You could compile a list of what's available, as a starting point – this would save some meeting time

A list of sources of information, people to contact, flexible education options and more awareness of all these save some meeting time.

It would be helpful for personal details to be held centrally so that all the professionals could access the details then you only had to fill in one set of forms.

If there was less form- filling and box-ticking....

If meetings were more productive so that you needed less of them.

Needs the input of the young people to identify what they aren't getting help with.

A lifeskills helpline would be useful—it could be anonymous and refer you to someone near.

One person who can oversee everything would be good.

Recommendations incorporating what YP said would be helpful

As can be seen from the quotes and the stories of the YP's journeys issues around communication and information dominate the suggestions of what would be helpful.

Some of these recommendations may be argued by agencies to already exist or be happening. If that is the case then the YP are not aware of them or experiencing the benefits of them and their effectiveness needs reviewing.

Communication

Better communication was suggested between children's service workers and adult service workers with

- centralised and shared information and forms
- more input by the YP to identify where they think they need more support (The documentation in 'My Transition Guide' covers this)
- a lead/key person as a single point of contact and to be able to provide an overview should be identified. Ideally the YP would have some say in this choice to ensure that it was someone they could relate to, who had the required '*empathy, understanding and commitment*' the YP have stated that they deem essential.

Information

There were a number of suggestions about making information easier to access.

- it should be more readily available and presented in a variety of ways, to suit individual learning styles
- more awareness and advice about different and flexible approaches to continuing education e.g. Activity Agreements.
- information about life skills should be available
- information should be available earlier
- information about benefits—more clarity about the relationship between Activity Agreements/Child Benefit/EMA as this was causing confusion to two of the three young people on Activity Agreements In the consultation.

Meetings

Meetings could be improved by

- more attendance generally and by key people in particular to ensure that decisions are constructive and translated into action
- more structure - at the risk of increasing formality this could be achieved by some form of documentation which made clear what had been decided, who was responsible for actions, what would be the purpose of the next meeting. (The documentation in 'My Transition Guide' could fulfil this function)

Leaving Care

Though it only applied to one YP in the consultation she clearly felt that her transition from care to independent living had been rushed and she had felt unsupported and unprepared for it. She made a number of suggestions *'You need to build up from care accommodation into your own flat – a couple of nights a week to begin with'* *'They need to find ways to move kids out more slowly'*. *'You struggle so much with all the other stuff. You need Careers, Barnardos, budget advice etc - you need support BEFORE you leave care, a rough plan of action'*

My Transition Guide

The 'Transition Maps', 'To Do List' and 'My World Triangle' pages contained within the 'My Transition Guide' would provide useful documentation to ensure that the YP's views are explored and are recorded and also to provide some structure for meetings to ensure that they are more productive.

Consideration should be given to investigating why services are not using this document and perhaps amending it if necessary. There may also be a training issue as the one social worker reported as using it had it on computer, but the young person had no access to or ownership of it.



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