

# **Research on Transition and Advocacy in Newport**

**A research report by :**

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**for**

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## Introduction

Transition from school to adult life for people with learning disabilities, whether attending special or mainstream school, is clearly a crucial time. There is accepted transition Code of Practice that defines good practice in this area (WAG, 2002). The code sets out the aspirations of transition for young people with learning and other disabilities. Its fundamental principles include :

- That the views of the child should be sought and taken into account
- That parents have a vital role to play in supporting their child's education
- All those involved in the process should adhere to the principles that underpin the nature of transition and transition planning and the requirements of the young people and their families.
- Transition planning should address the comprehensive needs of the child.

The Code of Practice makes allowance for those who receive a Statement of Special Educational Need to have an annual review. The reviews for year 9 and after should include a Transition Plan that involves the agencies that may play a major role in the young person's life during the post-school years and must involve Careers Wales.

*“The head teacher, the local education authority, and Careers Wales should facilitate the transfer of relevant information to ensure that young people receive any necessary specialist help or support during their continuing education and vocational or occupational training after leaving school.” (WAG, 2002; Sect. 9.49)*

## Background

We cannot assume that the Code of Practice and Transition Planning works well in reality, and we need to question how relevant aspects of the Code work in practice for young people and families. Previous research has suggested a number of typical problems that have arisen nationally with transition in practice, and which may be of relevance to practice in Newport. These may be summarised as follows:

- Not all young people who are entitled to a transition plan get one. Many more who may need one do not have one.
- Parents and young people often remain poorly informed of the options that may be available to them at the transition stage, which hampers good decision-making. Young people are sometimes not involved in their transition planning meetings, despite Code of Practice guidance that it is essential they be involved.
- Transition still often means a move into adult service's placements that do not necessarily offer a five-day entitlement. This puts new pressure on young people with learning difficulties and their parents when moving from five-day activity in school.
- Often the preferred route for families is a college place where five-day provision is the norm. However, some young people, particularly people with learning difficulties, continue to find it difficult to access appropriate college places through transition planning (Angele, Heard, & Kennedy, 1996).

- Transition from school often means moving from a known and often long-standing set of health care arrangements, provided through Paediatric or Child Health services, to adult health care systems. Lack of continuity of care, and lack of specialist knowledge of young people's conditions are common concerns of families, particularly where young people have complex needs.
- Employment is often not pursued as an area of opportunity within transition planning, or in parallel adult social care planning (Barnardo's Policy Development Unit, 1996). Still, very few young people with learning difficulties enter employment straight from school (Beyer, Goodere, & Kilsby, 1996). Evidence from college transition suggests that the problem of getting employment is still there when people leave college (Making the Jump).
- Where people pursue employment, many still find that there is a lack of personal support available, poor transport to work, and welfare benefit regulations that hinder rather than help people move with confidence into work.
- Moving into a housing away from parents is also seldom addressed in transition, partly because of a lack of accessible housing with support, partly because of inadequate co-ordination between housing and social services departments. Poor knowledge of housing issues among social services staff has been highlighted as a contributing factor (Morris, 1999).
- The availability of personal assistance is key for many if they are to leave their parents home and be independent. Such assistance is costly and many have found that this is a barrier to their becoming employed, as they would not be able to afford help on a wage rather than benefit.
- The transition planning system is primarily aimed at young people who have received a statement of special educational need. This does not include all people with learning disabilities and some, particularly those with borderline or mild learning disabilities, may not be included in reviews. If they are reviewed, social services departments may not agree that they are disabled enough to be eligible for the services they provide, which may again reduce the support available to this vulnerable group in transition (Florentino & Leigh, 1998).
- One of the main criticisms of transition planning has been the emphasis on allocating defined services or resources and not on whole life planning.
- When creative planning techniques such as Person Centred Planning are used, young people and families can come up with significant ideas for new activities or roles, and life changes for the young person. Problems can arise in finding resources to support more novel and individual options either while still at school, or in the post-school adult situation, often because of lack of flexible support options.

- Unemployment rates are 12%-17% for people with learning disabilities compared to 50% disabled people generally and 80% general population.
- Where employment support is available 56% of families report that they want their young person to get a job. In the same places, 45% of young people said they wanted a job when they left school. (Kaehne and Beyer, In Press)
- Six months after they left school only 21% of young people who wanted a job were in employment. For those who said they wanted a college place, 66% were in college 6 months later. This suggests that, it was more difficult to follow the employment route, even with the additional help available in these areas. (Kaehne and Beyer, in press)

### **Research questions**

Advocacy Action Wales (AAW) was asked by Newport Borough Council to carry out research in the area of transition from school as part of their service provision contract. The aims of the research were to:

- Shed light on local issues facing parents and young people in transition from school;
- Highlight barriers contributing to any reduction in positive transition outcomes;
- Highlight practical steps for relevant agencies that could assist people at this difficult stage in their development;
- Underline the role advocacy might play locally in assisting people in transition.

AAW offers a range of advocacy services locally, operating under a number of contracts. The types of services include:

- Citizen Advocacy- Where concerned non-disabled people are recruited and supported by the agency to advocate in key areas of life on behalf of those people who cannot advocate effectively for themselves e.g. in Person Centre Planning.
- Expert Advocacy- Where people with particular professional skills or expertise are recruited by the agency to provide specialist input to, or advocate on behalf, people around specific specialist issues e.g. legal issues.
- Self-Advocacy- Where people are supported by the agency to advocate for themselves as individuals, or to come together to advocate on behalf of all people with learning disabilities.
- Conciliation/conflict resolution- Where the agency helps people and agencies in dispute to come to an agreeable solution.

The research was undertaken on behalf of AAW by Dr. Stephen Beyer and Dr. Mark Kilsby, both of whom have considerable experience in research on transition for young people with learning disabilities.

Given the overall brief, AAW identified the following questions that the research seeks to answer:

1. What do people with learning disabilities/families want from the transition process in Newport?
2. What are the issues that people face in getting the outcomes they want?
3. What are the key barriers that remain to their achieving these outcomes?
4. What further steps can agencies in Newport make to remove barriers and to help them achieve the transition outcomes they want?
5. What role can advocacy, in its broadest sense, play in assisting people with learning disabilities, their families, and agencies to achieve the transition outcomes they want?

## **Method**

All research is a compromise between the level of rigour needed to answer the research questions, and the resources needed to deliver a definitive answer. The resources available for this research required that the fieldwork provide accurate and unbiased evidence for decision makers within available resources. The research therefore included individual interviews with professionals, parents and young people, and separate focus groups with young people and parents.

### *Who we talked to*

Interviews were also carried out with the following professionals in the Newport transition network:

- Two transition workers, one working with young people with learning disabilities at school, and one mainly for college leavers.
- Two social services team managers involved with adults with learning disabilities
- One advocacy worker
- Two parent's participation development workers
- One College European funded transition project representative

The researchers also targeted young people & families who fell into two groups. Those parents and their sons/daughters who had left school (the post transition groups), and those families whose sons or daughters were currently at school and looking ahead to leaving within the next few years (pre-transition group). We initially approached 50 families who met these criteria. With the assistance of transition workers from social services, the Equinox project, and the head of Maes Ebbw School, and the Parents for Change group each family was sent a leaflet outlining the project and asking them to "contract in." Each family were also sent an easy read version of the briefing materials, to inform them and ask for their involvement. Young people were asked to agree to their parents taking part also.

In total 48 stakeholders contributed to this research. Nineteen through interviews and 29 spread across 3 focus groups. Two separate post-transition focus groups were

organised. Focus group 1 consisted of 9 young people. Six of these young people had attended special school and three mainstream schools. Focus group 2 was attended by 13 parents whose sons and daughters had recently left school (nine being the parents of the youngsters who had attended focus group 1).

Originally, it was hoped to conduct separate interviews with 10 teenagers and 10 parents in the pre-transition phase. Interview permissions for this group were difficult to obtain and only 4 pre-transition parents agreed to be interviewed. To counter this, an additional focus group was arranged through the 'Parents for Change' group in Newport. This was attended by 6 parents and a local transition worker. Seven school age teenagers were interviewed, with ages ranging from 13 to 19 years of age. Four of those interviewed were due to leave school in 2007 or 2008. Although the numbers participating in the pre-transition group were less than hoped for, there were common themes reported by parents and their sons and daughters, that reflect local concerns.

#### What we asked people

All the participants in the project were asked what role, if any, they felt advocacy might play in the transition process. Where participants were unclear about what types of advocacy existed, then the researchers described the various forms available, (see Appendix 1). Interview schedules and focus group topic questions with parents and young people covered the following issues:

- How young people, and their families, been consulted over their futures
- The advice, information and experiences that they been given to consider these future options, from what sources, and how satisfactory have they been
- The support they have had to consider their future options and to make the right decisions for them
- What Advocacy means to young people and families
- What barriers people have faced in deciding on their future, including the availability of post-school options
- What help people want in their decision-making and to achieve the outcomes they want from transition

The Interviews conducted with the parents and youngsters lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and were qualitative in format. Interviews were taped for further analysis, with the permission of the interviewee. These were supplemented with hand-written notes.

Interviews conducted with professionals dealt with the following issues:

- Definitions of the transition process from their organisations perspective
- The main sources of information, advice and advocacy support available to young people and families in transition from school and college
- What people with learning disabilities/families want from the transition process in Newport
- The most important steps agencies in Newport take to remove barriers and to help young people achieve the transition outcomes they want
- The role advocacy can play in assisting people with learning disabilities, their families, and agencies to achieve the transition outcomes they want

These interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes in duration. As with the family interviews, they were taped for further analysis and were supplemented with hand-written notes.

## **The views of professionals**

### *What is the nature of transition and what people want from it?*

After interviewing professionals with a role in transition, or in supporting parents through transition, we found that there were two main views of what transition was about. Professionals involved in delivering support emphasised the need to help young people and families through the agreed transition process as smoothly as possible, while the advocacy and carer representatives we interviewed emphasised supporting choice. For those responsible for delivering the services, the timing of intervention was noted as an important factor, as was the importance of creating as seamless a procedure as possible. As one manager stated:

*“The aim is to try to make it smooth, should be as though nothing’s happened. However it is a big deal.”*

Successful transition was often qualified as a successful move from one placement (school) to another (college, day service place or a job). Their managers viewed one of their roles as establishing procedures that enabled this to occur. This involved establishing assessment procedures to identify the likely support requirements, creating care plans that focussed on the arrangements for transition, and finding placements and securing funding. These activities had to be balanced against what services were available at the time, and realistic against local budget allocations. As one manager explained, the role of adult day services was to offer support in a variety of setting options. These included:

*“Residential, college, on-going support and training, day services or domiciliary services.”*

Although transition into integrated activities was viewed as a goal for services, some felt that realistically this would require an ongoing and progressive phase of service development. Supported employment was now seen as a realistic option for some, but generally, further modifications were required to increase the potential of young people to develop their aspirations and make choices from a greater number of options than is currently available. However, Person Centred Planning was seen as an important potential driver for successful transition in the future, which did have more emphasis on personal outcomes, and a creative approach to developing new forms of provision. Newport had spent WAG Section 7 monies to commission a large piece of PCP development work from Learning Disability Wales from 2004 to 2007, training 40 facilitators to work with people of all ages from 14 onwards. This included staff in special school and social services children’s teams, and included casework with young people in children’s services. PCP should feed into transition planning and Unified Assessment where relevant. The impact of PCP in transition planning was felt to be beginning to flow through into transition procedures.

As mentioned, the advocacy and carer representatives we interviewed emphasised supporting choice rather than the current practicalities of delivering services.

*“One of the main aims is a focus....to allow them to change their minds and express views.”*

They tended to place more emphasis on the need to develop services in accordance with the personal aspirations and choice, this, it was argued would place more emphasis on the need to develop new services that were currently unavailable. One interviewee emphasised the need to create personal choice by offering a greater variety of opportunities for youngsters to experience and think about the variety of activities that are offered to their non-disabled peers. This would involve more work experience, work-based learning opportunities and career planning opportunities within the school curriculum, the development of person centred plans that feed these thoughts and experiences directly into transition plans, and a reorientation of adult and educational service provision towards delivering more support in community locations. Some of the professionals pointed to poor expectations as being part of the problem. This was apparent within some families, school and college staff, and within some adult social and health services and was reflected in school and college curricula, and a tendency for families to look to services as a source of respite, rather than as an agent for progressing the educational, career and leisure aspirations of the youngsters.

The professionals also presented their views on what they felt parents and their sons and daughters require from the transition process. This focussed on the provision of information. As one professional stated:

*“They want to know all about the different kinds of services that are going to be available. They want to know about the costs of services, because that changes from children’s services to adults. They want to know about respite, benefits and accommodation...and also looking at are there any opportunities for education, training work.”*

*“Information is key I think. There is so much to think about.”*

As we shall see, this view was endorsed by families, who identified the need for information on available services as one of their primary needs. The professionals also recognised that what families wanted was often the same as any other family at this stage in life.

*“A lot of these issues are the same that would happen to any family with any person leaving education and going out into adult life.”*

*“They want the best for their off-spring. They want the same as other parents and certainty in life.”*

This will form an interesting discussion point as on the one hand the professionals identified the need for providing safe and secure services, while on the other implying that service provision should reflect more fully the variety of options and opportunities available to non-disabled youngsters during and upon leaving school.

These can be perceived as having higher risks associated with them, with heavy reliance on ‘natural supports’.<sup>1</sup>

There was recognition among transition workers in particular, that there were restrictions on what was offered through this extended network. Careers Wales was seen as mainly targeting college places for young people. Access Supported Employment were seen as mainly working with people who wanted to work for 16 hours or more per week, and this was regarded by these respondents as not suiting everyone who wanted to work.

Professionals recognised that, in reality, choice was heavily constrained by what was available. Choices were not about what people wanted, but working with them to decide what was possible. For transition workers, this involved looking at a wide range of factors, including the welfare benefits that people received and the options that flowed from their income status. Options considered did include day centre, colleges, supported employment (e.g. Newport’s own Access Supported Employment, Mencap’s Pathway Employment, and the Rathbone Society), residential options for staying at home or moving out, and more specific providers such as the National Autistic Society.

Day services was seen as a scarce resource now for leavers, particularly as a five-day per week service. This partly reflected the changes in the eligibility criteria, but also local policy aspirations.

*“This can actually have a positive effect because it encourages people not just to rely on one service, but encourages them to go of and look at maybe employment, go to college, go to night school, go to community Ed. So you are not just going into day services and your there for 20 odd years. It makes people think a little differently about how they can fulfil their day that is very meaningful.”*

Increasingly, therefore, transition workers are encouraging people to look for more “mixed” opportunities for people, such as parts of the week spent in day centre, leisure opportunities or perhaps attending college to gain a vocational qualification. Newport C.C. and Vision 21 secured ESF funding to offer placements and training opportunities through a pilot “Doorstep Delights” sandwich service and an extension to provide catering in Newport’s Bellview Park. Managers and Transition workers were also looking into using Volunteers to develop alternative modes of support.

Accessing college places can be problematic, particularly in relation to supporting people with greater need to attend college for their education. There has been work to deliver courses in day services rather than college as part of a “stepping stones” approach to further inclusion. The day services now offer 15 OCN courses within the service in partnership with community education. Planners are looking at what opportunities may be available through the library services. While this initiative represented a policy aimed at developing educational routes for the youngsters, one professional suggested that these courses did not necessarily represent what young

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<sup>1</sup> These are non-disabled members of the community, such as co-workers in a paid job, community project managers and staff and non disabled students attending Colleges

people wanted. This raises an interesting debate about the best ways to ensure that the services delivered reflect the choices of their young recipients. On the one hand, the services offered should reflect diverse personal needs and aspirations of the youngsters, on the other, setting up the service in this way can be viewed as a positive way of ensuring that people have the option of engaging in some form of educational route. Newport Family Aide services do provide assistance for people to access community activities out of normal service hours, as well as running groups for people (e.g. drama, swimming etc.) in integrated and separate situations.

*What are the main sources of information, advice and advocacy support available to young people and families in transition from school and college?*

In terms of the main sources of information for young people and families around transition and the options available post-transition, many different sources were mentioned. These included Advocates, Teachers, Transition workers, Careers Wales, the local Colleges, Day Centre Staff, Supported Employment Providers, Social Workers, and the Parents for Change organisation. The Transition workers did direct work with young people and families, but also pointed people to other sources of information and services, such as Mencap, the Citizens Advice Bureaux and Careers services and the special needs advisors and the local Youth Services.

*What are the issues that people face in getting the outcomes they want?*

Professional accounts of the difficulties young people and their families face in getting the outcomes they want from transition fell into three categories:

- Problems in co-ordination between agencies
- Problems in information and support for decision making
- Problems in the availability of post-transition options

**In terms of co-ordination between agencies**, in the past there had sometimes been disjuncture in creating plans while young people are in school, or within children's social services, and carrying these through into the financial service delivery plans of adult services. In this respect Newport has echoed finding from elsewhere about the difficulties of transitioning between children's and adult services. This is been an early focus for joint planning through the Transitional Planning Group, the aim being to secure a more integrated process between children's and adult services teams, and education. The introduction of a transitional Planning Officer has also assisted in co-ordinating plans across the children's adult divide.

**In terms of availability of information**, some of the professionals we talked to recognised that information on its own was not enough. Transition was clearly a very stressful period for families and young people, and information about available options were not always forthcoming, although some felt that more information currently exists with the children's services compared to adult day services. Most felt that many parents were unsure about who they should contact and talk to about available services and procedural options during transitioning. People needed a point of reference, someone they could contact to talk through their uncertainties.

*“Someone to call. A name and a number to talk with.”*

An additional factor that they identified was the tension in decision making between young people and their parents. Their views on what was the best next-step after school or college can be at odds. This can be a genuine difference of opinion on the information that people have. It can also be a fear of change on either part.

*“Young people are dependent on family therefore they accept what the family wants.” (Parent Participation Worker)*

*“Difficult to know what parents want. Often conflict with their child’s view.” (Parent Participation Worker)*

We cannot generalise what young people want, as there is such a wide spectrum of individual need and aspiration. This tension between parents and children provides a focus for support, and highlights the role that independent advocacy can play.

*“They want services to be more efficient and say what they mean. Expert advocacy can push services to do this.” (Parent Participation Worker)*

The problem of balancing young people with learning disabilities exercising informed, independent choices, and the views of other people who know them well also extended to the professionals. Some noted that the extent that service providers know a young person can have a significant bearing on the way that information is perceived and used. At the transition stage, those assisting the person through school, have got to know the person well and may have a better idea of their abilities and aspirations and personalities, than those in adult services, having just met them

*Young people in transition have people in school and children’s services who have got to know them well, sometimes over many years. They may well have considered ideas on what would suit the person in their next steps. Some respondents noted that at the boundary between children’s and adult services, young people have contact with professionals who know them well and some who are getting to know them.*

*A young person may say “no” to a transition option, and the team that know them well will feel confident in pushing them towards a particular option, as they know the person, while as those new to the person may support them in an ill-informed choice, trying to respect their autonomy to make the choice. One can conceive of situations where the position of each set of professionals would be correct. Independent safeguards are needed to ensure that informed choice is being made.*

**In terms of availability of post-transition options,** One respondent identified PCP as a potential driver for new patterns of service and opportunity for young people in transition. However, one problem is that PCP generates person centred desires and these may well progressively require a change in roles for service staff to achieve greater flexibility. This will require a significant initiative to manage change in resources.

Many of the aspirations of transition policy favour community inclusion. Learning disability policy in Wales and the rest of the UK promotes ordinary activity and the

involvement of mainstream community organisations in providing opportunities for disabled people. One view among the professionals we talked to was that the transition process in Newport does try to link into some more mainstream opportunities, but does not take full advantage of what might be available.

*“I don’t think they link in particularly well (to mainstream community projects). I also don’t think they link into mainstream youth groups and such like. I don’t think they do that well.” (Manager)*

This represents an area where more opportunities may be developed to add to those that are specially provided for people with learning disabilities. One professional also put forward the view that there was no common overall vision among the stakeholders of the goals and aims of services, or, how to judge the extent that any particular approach was having an impact. The development and delivery of services, therefore, may be being restricted not only by low expectations, but also a lack of knowledge and awareness of what constitutes ‘good practice’. This person suggested the reintroduction of Social Role Valorisation Training (SRV).

*What are the most important steps that your, and other, agencies in Newport make to remove barriers and to help young people achieve the transition outcomes they want?*

Our professional respondents had a number of suggestions on how agencies could take the transition agenda forward:

- Take advocacy seriously. Underpin it with funding. Big need for specialist provision in this area.
- Increase expectations. Provide individual services, and divert people away from Day Services.
- Make more attempts to help young people fit into local community projects, especially the more able.
- Work with younger parents. Bring people together with better information....this is starting to happen.
- Work one-to-one with people through PCP and Individual Living Plans.
- Create a dedicated Transition Office where transition workers could come together and become a fixed point for information on transition
- Create a bigger transition team. Have more people “joint working” on transition. *“Be clear whose role it is. Social Services? Careers Wales? Colleges?”*
- Have a better integration of referral forms for day centres, the Adult Services Team and other services. There is too much duplication of form filling at present during the transition time.

- We need more training providers, more Youth Access provision, more opportunities for “soft training” (training work-related social skills) and more job opportunities post-college.
- Continue to explore new ways to engage parents more. Writing to people is ineffective. We need to find an issue that would get them involved and “reward” parents with relevant feedback on what happens as a result of their involvement.

*What role can advocacy, in its broadest sense, play in assisting people with learning disabilities, their families, and agencies to achieve the transition outcomes they want?*

Our parent and advocacy respondents cautioned over a prescriptive involvement of independent advocacy. They felt that individuals needed to be empowered wherever possible, to speak for themselves, so do not need advocacy from anybody else. Other respondents highlighted the need for both self- and independent advocacy in a number of areas. Principally, there was a consensus that advocacy was needed to bring forward the young person’s perspective in transition, to ensure other stronger voices did not overpower them.

*“Enabling the service user to have a voice. Sometimes the service users voice is not always listened to by parents. I have seen that quite a few times. The advocates role sits very clearly in supporting the service user to have a voice in see their lives being fulfilled.” (Manager)*

Additional advocacy capacity was needed to achieve this, however.

*“There is not an advocate out there for every child that want a voice.”(Transition Worker)*

The investment in Newport in PCP is, it was argued, providing a new context for the young person in transition to have their say on their future. It was suggested that there was a role for independent advocacy to help some young people to plan their lives in the context of PCP, ensuring that peoples’ own views come through. Another suggested that increasingly, independent advocates should be given in PCP training to equip them for this role. One professional argued that independent advocacy should ideally be available should be offered from 14 years of age.

Advocates were also seen by a number of professional to have a potential role in supporting parents, in particularly demanding circumstances.

*“...such as somebody wants to make a complaint, they are not happy with a particular situation and they don’t know where to turn, and need additional help, guidance and support.” (Manager)*

*“Advocacy is key. It is a point of parent contact during the transition stage.” (Parent Development Worker)*

*“Help parents who face challenges to have more of a chance. This would include POVA arrangements.” (Manager)*

One respondent suggested that advocacy could provide conflict resolution between a carer and a young person with a learning disability. Another suggested that some parents and some young people needed help to develop more assertiveness, and this could be a role for advocacy. A further role described by two respondents was advocating on behalf of young people with learning disabilities, or lobbying, mainstream community project for “open door” policies to enable more equitable access to community activity. This included advocating against “discrimination” within colleges for access to generic courses with adequate support. All respondents recognised that organisations like Advocacy Action Wales could play an important role in this respect.

## **The views of young people and parents**

### **Post-transition Young Adult Group**

When the young adults who had left school were asked what they had wanted to do at the time they left, 4 of the respondents said they wanted to get a job and 5 said they wanted to go to college. The group also had clear ideas about what they wanted to do with their careers with 2 people stating they wanted to be Fireman, 2 wanting admin jobs in an office, 3 people said they wanted to go to college and become Gardeners or Cooks, 1 person wanted to be a Police Officer, and one person, who had received a paid job Asda’s wanted to carry on working there. The college option, for some had become a reality with 4 of the young people attending a local college undertaking cookery and horticultural courses.

However, despite these aspirations, paid employment had not become a reality for many, with only one person in the group undertaking paid work in Asda’s. Of the remainder, 2 people were working in local supermarkets undertaking work experience, another young person reported that they been on a work preparation course with the council for 8 months. This had created frustration for some in the group. One person stated:

*“The whole reason I am working for nothing in Morrison’s is so that it turns into a paid job.”*

Another stated:

*“They promised me a job when I started work preparation but nothing has happened. They promised so much.”*

Most young people who had received help said that the advice had been very good and had helped them to think about what to do when they left school. The main source of this assistance had come from parents, teachers and in one case a Social Worker. However, some felt that they could have benefited from additional support. Notably, two young people said that they could have undertaken more trips to see placements prior to them leaving school. In addition, two young people felt that there was a lack of follow-through in finding them employment as a placement:

*“People say they they’re helping but they are not doing anything – I am frustrated”*

Although obtaining paid employment had been difficult for many, the group still had a desire to move into paid jobs. When asked what they would like to do next 1 person now wanted to work in a hotel, another in an office for pay, one person now wanted to be a Builder and would go to college if they could get on a relevant course, another said they wanted to work in drama or pantomime group, another that they now wanted to be a Carpenter. One young person wanted to stay working in the supermarket for now but wished that it was paid, another wanted to be a Taxi Driver, for money and another stated:

*“I’d like a place of my own and have my own Company – be a businessman.”*

When the young adults were asked who would help them to achieve these aims 1 person mentioned Pathways Employment Service, but 6 people in the group had not heard of supported employment and did not know what role a job coach performs. Seven young people suggested that their Social Worker would help them, and another 2 felt that their Parents were the best source of support.

When the group were asked what role they felt advocacy might play, 7 of the 9 respondents did not know what an advocate was. However, when the types of advocacy services were explained to them all felt that they had an important role to play, especially for people found it difficult to communicate their views and the group began to identify potential area of support. The group felt that 2 members in the group definitely needed an advocate due to communication problems. Four of the group identified a potential role for advocates to help them and make sure they got a paid job, while another felt that advocates may be able to help them to *“get a place of my own.”*

### **Post-transition Parent Group**

What did you and your sons and daughters need during and after transition?

When the post-transition parents were asked this question there was a consistent view, as with the professionals, that information on available options was essential. The parents generally felt that the support their sons and daughters received while at school had been good and the input provided by the teachers was praised by all. However, there was a perception that on leaving school, the amount of support provided had diminished and that continuity between in transition was jeopardised severely by service providers not turning up to meetings:

*“No trouble through the school but after it all fell apart.”*

*“As soon as they become 18 everything falls away.”*

The parents also reinforced the views of the professionals, that information was hard to obtain and that parents also needed emotional support during the transition period:

*“We had to speak for our children. Many professionals did not show up for transition meetings.” (Focus Group)*

*“Careers Wales have been helpful in getting my daughter into [special school] and haven’t been in touch since.”*

It was also very clear that parents felt that information was not forthcoming from services in a systematic way and was often complicated. One parent described how she had referred her son to the local Community Support Team. This was so complicated that she only knew how to do it because she had previously worked in a Social Service Department. None of the parents were aware that there are now Transition workers or what their role is, had not heard of direct payment options, and were unclear about the roles of Action Advocacy Wales. However, the parents praised certain individuals working for AAW and saw the potential for AAW to facilitate information sharing events and in ensuring that they and their sons and daughters had more of a voice in the services provided on them leaving school. All of the parents rejected the local day service as a potential option for their sons and daughters, reflecting the aspirations of the young persons focus group.

Most of the parents recalled that they had to seek out information, or, rely on obtaining information through the “grapevine”. It was only when they bumped into other parents (e.g. in town or in supermarkets were both mentioned) that they found things out. They reported that there was no formalised parent group that provided a source of information.

Only one parent felt that they had received adequate support from social services for their daughter on leaving school. This was because she had behavioural problems and was high priority to receive services. This raises an interesting debate. While on the one hand it is clear that some people will require more ongoing and intensive levels of support due to the severity of their disabilities, on the other, it can be seen as a useful investment to provide some level of support to kick start career oriented and educational activities for others. Another parent reported that:

*“For 6 months after leaving school our son was stuck at home losing skills”*

When the parent group was asked how much involvement they and their son or daughter had wanted when they left school, the overwhelming response of parents was that they had had little, or no, input into the transition process. Main concerns were that there was not really any other options presented to their sons and daughters other than the College route. This was a strong view expressed throughout the group that college was often recommended as the only option as far as their young person was concerned:

*“It was automatically assumed that on leaving school X would go to college – but no-one asked us.”*

*“Parents are told that there is little available for adults. This is very worrying for parents.”*

Seven of the parents in the group had not heard of the local Pathways service and were unaware of the options presented through the supported employment approach.

*“We were told point blank that he would never have a paid job.”*

The majority of parents said that employment was not mentioned on leaving school. Where families had explored employment subsequent to leaving school, the results had been mixed. Two parents commented that they had contacted social services about support for paid work two years ago and that they were still waiting for a service. One parent complained that her daughter had had to choose between Access to Work (Jobcentre Plus programme) and support through the Pathways supported employment service (offered through Mencap). She had been told that she could not have both, but was still unsure why. Another parent reported that their son had been supported through Pathways, but that the agency had withdrawn their support too early and that he got into trouble as a result and lost his job.

Most of the recommendations made by the post transition parents related to finding better ways of providing families with information about a wider range of options. There should be more formalised information routes and parents needed a point of contact to provide practical and emotional support. Parents also felt disempowered and urged the development of a formal parent network.

### **Pre-transition Family Views**

When parents of teenagers still attending school were asked what their aspirations were for their sons and daughters when they left school parents generally wanted their sons and daughters to be happy and have the support they require to live fulfilling lives.

*“To live independently, housed with support.” (Focus Group)*

*“A choice to do what they want and to be happy.” (Focus Group)*

*“To have the support that they need.” (Focus Group)*

This reinforces the point made by professionals that parents with disabled children have very similar aspirations for their sons and daughters as parents of non-disabled children. The pre-transition parents also understood the importance of the transition stage to their child’s development and felt the weight of their parental responsibilities. One parent stated:

*“They’ve got to live in the real world. If we make a mistake now we might ruin things for the rest of my child’s life.” (Interview)*

The view of parents on what was the most desirable next step after school for their son or daughter was far from clear. However, there were two majority views, one that college was the best option, sometimes with a residential element to meet needs or to provide respite for the family. There was support for college as a good next step for some young people. As two parents stated during an interview:

*“Live independently. He is academically quite good, so college might be an option.” (Interview)*

*“To go on to college. To get the best education that she can.” (Interview)*

The second is that a job would be the best option:

*"X wants to work in ASDA." (Interview)*

*"To choose a career he'd like." (Focus Group)*

*"To be able to have a job. I think I've left it too late." (Focus Group)*

This was encouraging as it reflected the views of the school attendees during the interviews. As one teenager stated:

*"Get a job. Want to work in ASDA, stacking shelves, or work in Tesco's. I want to be paid for it."*

The teenagers also reported other career routes they wanted to pursue including be a bus driver, work in a sports shop, cooking and becoming a Police officer (or a job that required a uniform of some sort). One young person expressed the desire to work at a local patent office where her mother worked.

As with the families in the post-transition groups, none of the parents and their sons and daughters expressed a desire to attend the local day centre. However, most of the parents we talked with felt that their view of what was desirable as a next step for their son or daughter was limited. The parents we talked to had a generally negative view of day centres, and no parent wanted this as the result of transition for their son or daughter.

*"I'd cry if he ended up in day centre." (Focus Group)*

On these limitations, most parents agreed that they were not being provided with too many options at present. As with the post-transition families, the parents with teenagers still at school felt there was one dominant option and that was to go to college.

*What are the issues that people face in getting the outcomes they want?*

As with the post transition families the pre-transition parents felt that there was a lack of information about what options were available to their sons and daughters on leaving school and they also felt that the dominant option was to move onto college.

*"Inadequate help. Not enough information. We don't know what's available for us." (Interview)*

Also, as with the post transition group most felt that the options available to them very limited and that there was an assumption made by services that this is what the youngsters wanted to do.

*"I have been given a basic option, college. No guidance, I just went to open days." (Focus Group)*

*"Nothing much. There is college and that's it." (Interview)*

*"No options, at least not one's I'm aware of." (Interview)*

Two of the parents interviewed mentioned Vision 21 as a potential option as did their son and daughter. Most of the pre-transition families we spoke to did not know what services were available to them for pursuing paid employment options. Only one of the parents interviewed had contacted Pathways, but said that they had "not got back to her." None of the focus group parents and only two of the young people interviewed were aware of the supported employment option. As one 15 year old stated:

*"You are the first person to ask me what I want to do when I leave school"*

Two parents suggested that options were dependent on ability. One parent felt that, as their child was at the more severe end of the spectrum of disabled they would not get access to some services. Another parent feared that her child might not get options through services as she might not be regarded as "bad enough."

*"There's not a lot for us. We have no help or support. We fought hard to get our kids into mainstream, but its so hard to keep them there." (Focus Group)*

A minority of parents suggested that the information available was sometimes not delivered at the time people needed it. In relation to employment, parents felt that some topics, such as employment options, needed to be dealt with earlier by agencies such as Careers Wales.

*"Why are we waiting until 16 to find out?" (Focus Group)*

As with the post transition group parents felt that information about transition services was not forthcoming, but required them to be pro-active in seeking out what was available. Parents said that they felt alone, and some of the parents had used the Internet to search for what was available for their child when they left school. None of the young people, and only one of the parents, reported that they understood what was meant by "direct payments," and this parent had no idea how to access them.

*"We have no help. Often parents are hundreds of pounds out of pocket getting the help they should have in the first place." (Focus Group)*

*"I need to go and knock on more doors and make appointments." (Interview)*

Parents reported that a place at a college of further education was the option most often offered to them, and that it was assumed that their son or daughter would go to college. As with the post transition families, the pre-transition parents argued that there should be a dedicated person to provide information to parents and ensure that they are enabled to engage more fully in choosing and creating school leaver options. There were parents whose young people were in mainstream school. They also felt that they were under-informed. Transportation was also mentioned as a potential problem in accessing college after leaving school. Without appropriate transport, parents felt they would struggle to get their son or daughter to college, and it would reduce their ability to take up options offered.

*Where do people get their information from and how good was it?*

Young people reported that their information around transition came only from a few important sources. In relation to college, young people mentioned Careers Wales in relation to finding out about college and jobs, and also to information gained on visits to colleges as being helpful in their choice.

*“Been down to the careers office and learned about jobs.” (Interview)*

A minority of young people said that nobody had spoken to them about what she wanted to do when she left school.

*“No one talked to me about what I wanted to do.” (Interview)*

Teachers were said to have been one of the most important sources of useful information around transition options for many young people, in one case school staff having introduced a young man to gardening, work that he now wanted to pursue after school. They had helped young people to think about what they wanted to do when they left school, had told young people about their options and, for one person, had helped them to develop their CV. About a third of young people said their Social Worker had helped them think about their transition options, and a further third had been helped in their decisions through the work experience they had had while at school, and also through work awareness lessons in the classroom.

As we have seen, parents were dissatisfied with the information they had received on options, and the range of options they had for the future. Although inadequate, parents were positive about the advice and support they had received from teachers and schools.

*“Not getting any help advice, only the school.” (Interview)*

However, the poor level of information they had received about post-school options was heavily influenced by the actions of others, and had been contributed to by a lack of input by relevant professionals:

*“People didn’t show up for the meetings. No trouble with teachers in the school. Others didn’t show up, for example Careers Wales*

However, for one parent transition from school to college had been positive in support terms, because her son had behavioural problems and been given the support from adult social services that he required. Only five parents (three interview and two focus group) mentioned the two Newport transition workers, even though for many they had been the source of referral to the focus group. One parent expressed concern about the post-19 transition worker losing her post when funding ends. Those parents who had been involved with them spoke highly of the two transition workers available to younger and older people.

*“If she went there would be nothing left and the loss would be devastating.” (Interview)*

What further steps can agencies in Newport make to remove barriers and to help people achieve the transition outcomes they want?

Young people had little to suggest on how transition could be improved. The main suggestions were in relation to finding paid employment.

*“Could have taken us on more trips to see more work.” (Focus Group)*

*“Help to choose and to get a job.” (Focus Group)*

They hoped in the future that more help would be available. We asked the young people who would help them achieve their post-school choices. One young person who wanted a job said a job coach from Pathways would help. The remaining young people did not know what a job coach was.

When we talked to parents they had more ideas on what changes were needed. First, people wanted better information. Parents felt that there should be more formalised information available on what young people could do after school, and the processes by which they might access these. At a minimum, parents wanted an information pack with all the relevant options and information in one place.

*“We need a portfolio of options. People aren't getting adequate help.” (Focus Group)*

Second, parents need help to access the information and understand it. Parents wanted one contact point, a dedicated person who can provide information, practical and emotional support in decision-making at this time. Some felt this could be delivered through the existing, and trusted, mechanism of the school. Others felt it could be delivered through more access to transition workers.

*“There is a need for some central information point and someone with knowledge of it all that can point some one through.” (Interview)*

*“Communication needs to be better. What options are available. Need a dedicated transition worker.” (Interview)*

Third, parents suggested the development of a formalised parent network that they felt should be funded and officially recognised.

Fourth, a small number of parents wanted provision of more options around employment.

*“Link up with local community projects and put work experience on school curricula, and use voluntary organisations.” (Interview)*

What role can advocacy, in its broadest sense, play in assisting people with learning disabilities, their families, and agencies to achieve the transition outcomes they want?

The majority of the young people we talked to said that they did not know what an advocate was or what they do. After it was explained what an advocate was all

thought that it was a good thing for people who cannot speak for themselves. Two people in the focus group felt that an advocate might help them, another person said they wanted an advocate to help them in the community, Three people said they thought an advocate might be able to help the to get a job. One person said an advocate might be able to help them to get “a place of their own.”

As with the post transition families, the pre-school respondents did not generally understand advocacy and its different options before it was introduced to them. However, in discussion, both the parents and young people parents did feel that advocacy and advocacy organizations could play a role in meeting some of the needs they had identified.

- Organisations like Advocacy Action Wales could host information sessions.
- If advocacy was to be involved it needed to help people get through the SEN Statementing process. Help was needed around the stress and the anticipation of the Statementing process.
- Parents suggested that there should be funding for this form of advocacy work so people didn't have to pay for it.
- Advocates may be able to assist the youngsters in pursuing the careers they want and the services they are provided with when they leave school.

## Transition in Wales

Before the end of the last National Assembly, the Education and Life-long Learning and Skills Committee produced a review of Transition arrangements, and after an extensive analysis of transition practice and issues, made a number of relevant recommendations. The current research supports some of these recommendations, and their relevance for Newport. First it highlights the need for further efforts to provide the right information about transition options, at the right time in the transition process.

*“the Assembly Government (AG) strengthen guidance to ensure that young people, their parents or carers are given in advance all the information they need to get the most out of the transition review process.” [Recommendation 4]*

Parents and young people have identified the need for additional assistance to provide one point of contact for information on transition option, for better information, and for direct assistance through the transition process. Dissatisfaction with current arrangements suggests under-provision at present, certainly at school transition age. The participation of post-transition families in this research, has suggested a continuing need for transition support from college to adult life also. WAG’s review identifies under provision of transition support across Wales, and a need for a stock take of current investment in this important area.

*“that the AG should, as a matter of urgency, establish how much is being spent across Wales to support transition to employment and further learning and should consider in the light of their findings whether expenditure in this area is adequate.” [Recommendation 39]*

Some of the young people we talked to had had work experiences while at school. Not all of these had proved successful, and there was room for better quality and stronger links to subsequent employment for those young people who want this. WAG recognize the need for better work experience while at school, both through encouraging more employer partnerships, and through enabling appropriate on-the-job assistance through supported employment provision for young people to explore employment while still at school.

*“WAG should remit an additional needs employment champion to look at how improved work placements for school pupils can be improved.” [Recommendation 35]*

*“that the AG identify and create funding mechanisms that foster collaboration and partnership working between schools and voluntary sector organisations skilled in vocational training and supported employment.” [Recommendation 43]*

The parents we talked to mentioned relatively few of the potential next step options that maybe available to young people. In addition to college and employment, there is work-based training provision. However, this has been criticized for not providing adequate support for learners with special needs. The WAG Review highlights the need to gear up these more generic providers to cater for people with additional needs.

*“that the AG gives work-base learning providers clear guidance on expectations and support to build their capacity to meet the needs of learners with additional needs.” [Recommendation 31]*

Transport has also been recognized as a significant factor in enabling young people to access post-school options.

*“that the AG considers and reports on how access to transport can be improved to even out inequalities of access and to improve progress.” [Recommendation 38]*

The WAG Review also recognises that independent advocacy has a role to play in supporting young people and parents in transition and recommends

*“that the AG continues to make the introduction of an independent advocacy service a matter of urgent priority.....” [Recommendation 11]*

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

The research created a forum to discuss the best ways to develop transition strategies within Newport. All participants expressed the need to develop services that reflect more fully the aspirations of the youngsters and their families, and to develop services that enable young adults leaving school to become more actively involved in integrated community activities. Currently, those involved in developing services in Newport are re-orientating their activities towards meeting these aims. When the voices of professionals, parents and the young people in transition are combined, then there is a coherent theme of wanting to change and modify services for the better, and a desire to create a platform for change based upon mutual understanding and well-reasoned debate.

The research identified a number of consistent themes that ran across all stakeholder groups. Certainly, there have been positive moves towards establishing procedures that may help to modernise and improve current transition procedures in Newport. Newport C.C. and Vision 21 secured ESF funding to offer placements and training opportunities through a pilot “Doorstep Delights” sandwich service and an extension to provide catering in Newport’s Bellview Park.

Person Centred Planning has recently been introduced and is widely viewed as a model of good practice. The approach has a battery of methods including the use of Circles of Support, MAP and Path and other methods to enable individuals to make self determined choices. If the person centred plans that are generated can be translated into day service practice, then this can lead to a more diverse experience for the users and an increase in the potential for a seamless transition to life-changing outcomes. The challenge for local services will be to ensure that information contained in these plans are filtered into, and reflective of the activities undertaken by the youngsters during and upon leaving school.

### Development of the Transition Steering Group

The impact of any recommendations resulting from this research will depend upon the extent that they can be delivered on the ground. Given the many stakeholders and the differences in their roles and responsibilities, and the complexity of funding sources, there is an obvious need for cross-agency co-ordination. Transition of young people with learning disabilities now includes people in mainstream schools. Generic policies around transition of young people are changing, and resources are being committed in support of them. These policies will come to dominate the 14-19 agenda. It is important that wider education and transitioning initiatives in Newport take account of the needs of people with learning disabilities.

*Recommendation 1: The finding supports the creation and work of the Transitional Planning Group representing key agencies and stakeholders. It underlines the continuing need for this group to coordinate joint work on transition, to promote good information provision to young people and families, and to develop more options with appropriate support post-transition in Newport.*

*Recommendation 2: 14-19 Learning Partnerships need to encompass the aspirations of people with learning disabilities. The concepts of Learning Coaches and investment plans under the 14-19 Pathway partnerships need to assist people with any move forward on the transition agenda for people with special needs.*

*Appropriate links with these partnerships and the Transitional Planning Group need to be strengthened.*

#### Provide greater access to Transition Officer resources

This research found evidence of the success of the Transitional Planning Officer role, both in leaving school and college. Families value a named person to act as a source of information and support to help them absorb, discuss and decide through the later period of the transition process. There was a clear demand for direct support, and this suggests that securing permanent staffing for current transition workers is important. Far from everyone had used the services of the Transition Officers currently available, suggesting that there is an unfulfilled demand for this type of service and that more resources could usefully be applied.

*Recommendation 3: Review investment in transition planning resources. Secure existing and increase transition worker time for those with learning disabilities transitioning from special and mainstream school, and college.*

#### Develop information sharing

The Lack of information available to parents during transition was an area highlighted for development. Professionals acknowledged it as a key area of importance a, not only for providing information, but also in terms of supporting and reassuring the families concerned. Parents were unclear about their options during transition, with college representing the only real option, apart from Day Centres, which many considered to be the poorer option. Although the day services have sought to increase options, the lack of information filtering down to parents about these options was evident, in both pre- and post-transition families. Generally, parents did not know what employment options were available, what role person centred planning played in the process, many had not had access to a transition worker, and few knew what roles advocacy and direct payments could play in assisting them during transition.

There is, therefore, a clear need to increase the availability and accessibility of this information to parents well before the final transition year. In line with the 14-19 pathways initiative, parents and their families should begin to receive this information from age 14, although alerting families of the alternatives at an earlier stage may have positive benefits in raising expectations in even younger children and their families. The research suggested a number of ways to improve the accessibility of information. There was a need for a centrally co-ordinated source that listed, in straightforward terms, what options and services are available to families. Teachers, transition workers, local employment and youth service initiatives, social care providers, advocates and those delivering PCPs, need work more closely together to develop materials and procedures for better informing parents of the available options and the procedures associated with transition. Parents also wanted a focal point, a named source that could provide support and advice on transition issues.

*Recommendation 4: That relevant agencies collaborate to develop an information pack around transition itself, and post-transition options, that is accessible, and is available from age 14 at least.*

### Increasing diversity through local employment initiatives

The research highlights the need to expand local employment support provision. Virtually all of the young participants expressed a desire to work for pay, but few were had a job, had been on work tryout, or were aware of the options that could assist them with this outcome. These concerns have been recognised in the Welsh Assembly's 14-19 Pathways Wales initiative and reiterated in the non-statutory framework for work related learning, to underline educational commitments that should be provided to all students at key stage 4 (14 to 16 year olds) around work-based learning (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004). This includes developing work-based opportunities and accreditation procedures that acknowledge the role that work-based learning can play in developing awareness and career aspirations:

*“Work-related learning is a significant aspect of the 14-19 curriculum. It is important that schools and colleges are aware of what work-related learning means for different students in different contexts. From September 2004 onwards it is a statutory requirement for all schools to provide all students at key stage 4 with work-related learning. Some schools and colleges will also want to ensure that students have the opportunity to build on this learning post 16.”*

Employment oriented activities, therefore is potential area for growth and development in Newport, in response to demand from young people and families. Research has highlighted a number of models of good practice in this area. While the development of approaches such as ‘stepping stones’ offers a progressive alternative work experience initiative for some, other approaches more readily lend themselves to a variety of work activities based in integrated work locations.

#### *Supported work experience while at school*

Work-experience and part-time paid work from about the age of 16 years is frequently part of the transitional path that typical young people take as they move into adult life and employment. This is acknowledged by the recent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidance that offer advice on support for 16 to 19 year olds.<sup>2</sup> They may begin this by undertaking work-based activities through school. These have been employed to act as ‘job tasters’, offering a variety of opportunities for young people to increase their vocational awareness and develop their career aspirations. They have also been applied as part of the school curriculum and have been usefully applied in the college context. While some young people in our sample had been involved, many had not. This is likely to be due to lack of resources and expertise within schools and lack of availability of partners to deliver adequately planned experiences. To be successful, young people with learning disabilities require: additional planning; more flexibility around hours and days of work; additional personal support for transport; and for some on-the-job support.

#### *Part-time work outside school*

Young people may also experience paid work though part-time activities such as baby-sitting or a newspaper round and later, Saturday or after- school work in local businesses. The experiences they have in these jobs help them to determine their

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/6th-form-schools/68\\_268.htm](http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/6th-form-schools/68_268.htm)

personal vocational strengths, gauge their future employment interests, and, in the case of paid work, appreciate a degree of financial independence for the first time. Young people also begin to be independent actors away from school or parents, they learn about the world of work, and what is required in terms of their behaviour.

The Youth Supported Employment Project (YSEP) (Kilsby et al., 2004, 2007) approach, using non-disabled peer mentors, has been successful in enabling students with a learning disability attending special schools in the 16 to 19 age group to obtain paid part-time jobs typical of their age group. One advantage of this approach is that it demonstrates the youngsters capability to obtain paid work prior to them leaving school.

*Supported Employment as an exit route to employment*

The research suggests that another option that should be more readily available and accessible to families is Supported Employment. The development of supported employment initiatives have significantly increased the numbers of people with learning disabilities progressing into paid work in the USA (over 35%), Canada (about 37%) and Australia (over 65%)(Lewis, 2003). This approach involves matching each job seekers abilities and work preferences to available jobs, providing initial one-on-one support until the person is able to work independently, and follow-up services to maintain contact with both the employer and employee. Although this service is available in Newport through the Pathways and Access initiatives, few parents were aware that this was an option for their sons and daughters when they left school. Information about such approaches should be more available, but also that those involved in delivering supported employment should be more pro-active role in identifying potential clients from transition cohorts. Expert welfare benefit advice on how to blend welfare benefits with employment is increasingly being seen as key to informing families on the employment option. One problem is the eligibility of young people for these services, most requiring the young person to be eligible for social services. A number will not be eligible, although they will require assistance.

Some young people with less severe disabilities may be able to gain employment through more generic routes such as Jobcentre Plus, Workstep, and New Deal. However, information and advice will again be needed at appropriate times. Providing enough appropriate resources to support young people through any of these options will be an important priority for any Transition Co-ordination Group and partner agencies. The National Assembly for Wales has highlighted the need for greater collaboration between voluntary sector providers and schools around these issues.

*Recommendation 5: Agencies need to encourage the development of a wider variety of supported work experience, part-time work, and supported employment exit strategy options from school and college in Newport. This needs to be a priority for Transitional Planning Group. Families should be made aware of employment options available post-transition from at least 14.*

*Recommendations 6: Explore partnership across public sector organisations, reflecting the Public Sector Equality Duty, to help provide greater access to work experience opportunities and jobs for people with learning disabilities in Newport.*

*The role of post-16 training*

We have seen from the NAW report on transition that the provision of appropriate vocational training opportunities for people with additional learning needs post-16 are inadequate both in volume and in their ability to support people with greater learning needs. In partnership with appropriate agencies, such as Careers Wales, the local authority needs to ensure that adequate provision of schemes and funding is available in Newport for those who can best progress through this route.

*Recommendation 7: The Transitional Planning Group needs to explore opening up appropriate education, training, which will lead to employment for young people in transition. These need to cater for the young people who can best develop from a training route.*

#### Individualised Funding Packages

Although local services were trying hard to increase the diversity of options available to youngsters in transition, the lack of actual alternatives other than those presented through congregated college or day centre options represents a major challenge. While processes are crucial in any service organisation, we need to ensure that transition does not become too focussed on placements. Progressively incorporating PCP within the transition planning system should help to remain focussed on individual outcomes and individual packages of activity and support. Clearly, the potential for developing services that reflect such individual planning are hindered by this lack of varied options and procedures need to be developed that more fully reflect the variety of choices that are generated. As in other Local Authorities, the use of direct payments in Newport is under-utilised. Direct payments remains a potential source for introducing flexibility in provision in response to more individual transition plans. Direct payments represent one potential funding source to achieve this.

*Recommendation 8: Progressively incorporate PCP within the transition planning system. Ensure that there is enough facilitator resources to support good transition planning. Further explore opportunities for individualised funding to support PCP and transition planning.*

#### Establish Links with Local Community Projects

Professionals in particular identified the potential for linking into local community projects. These can offer a diversity of activities in integrated environments including teaching basic IT skills, work-based learning, a chance to learn skills in simulated work settings, as well as host of leisure and recreational activities. These represent an area for growth in Newport, with the potential for offering age appropriate mainstream activities for youngster in school, or, those seeking to engage more fully with their communities on leaving school. This needs to be part of creating more placements options in response to family and young people's needs.

This means developing formal links between these projects, education and adult social services. Accessibility to the activities of some of these organisations may be poor for people with disabilities, and in most organisations, there may be no special provision for people with the particular learning requirements of the client group.

*Recommendation 9: Develop better links with a range of local community projects as a potential source for increasing options for school attendees and leavers in*

*integrated activities. Develop a strategy to deliver a greater openness of ordinary, age appropriate, social, educational, training, employment and volunteering opportunities for young people in transition in Newport, including those offered by Newport C.C. itself. Make full use of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and Equality Plans in this respect.*

### Advocacy

There appears to be a consensus among respondents that advocacy has an important role to play in transition. Despite the suggestions of young people in this study, and the broad nature of involvement they envisage for independent advocates, it is in supporting the young person's voice in transition decisions that the potential of advocacy lays. Person Centred Planning has also been mentioned as a significant context for advocacy work in Transition, to ensure that young people can successfully participate in PCP. Supporting families in difficult decisions, particularly in complaint situations, would be another role that families would support in Newport.

We do, however, need to be clear about the strengths of various approaches to advocacy. First, self-advocacy support must be further developed to help young people with learning disabilities be clearer on what they want, and to be assertive in making their own informed choices in transition. Independent advocates are not a substitute for good self-advocacy support. This is a long-term strategy, and must be part of peoples' education as they move towards transition. We need to start earlier in people's school careers to help them become effective self-advocates.

Second, many of those currently in transition are ill-prepared for independent decision making, and will need help now in lieu of further help to become better decision makers. Here people need the possibility of an independent advocate to help them make sense of their options without undue pressure from family or services.

Third, few of us make fully autonomous decisions, most of us drawing supported in various ways (e.g. advice, taking soundings, receiving information from various sources, help to identify options) in the decisions we make from those around us. We must not set up artificial conflicts between young people and parents, but must work more intensively and more creatively with those who love and support the young person with learning disability so that they have the information they need to make the best decisions for the future, together. This would include exploring better ways for young people and carers to resolve any differences they have in what should be in a person's transition plan. Social workers will undoubtedly have a major role to play in this respect.

*Recommendation 10: Secure adequate availability of independent advocacy to support young people with learning disabilities in voicing their own views on transition options within and outside PCP and to support families in difficult decision-making*

*Recommendation 11: Develop a strategy to deliver self-advocacy support for young people with learning disabilities in schools, early enough to impact on people ability to participate in the transition process when they are aged 16-18.*

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