

Risk & Response

Update Number 7: Transition to Adult Services

1. Introduction

This update examines the risk and protective factors, issues and interventions for young people's transition into adult services from specialist young people's and children's services.

1.1 From Children's to Adult Services

The shift from children and young people's services to adult services may be extremely complicated for a variety of reasons, not least that the cut-off age for attendance at children and young people's services varies both between areas and agencies, and that the remits of a young people's service and its adult equivalent may vary widely - if, indeed, there is an adult equivalent.

"Cut-off" points for children's services commonly vary between 16 and 19 years, and often depend on whether individuals are already attending the service and whether they are in full-time education. Services for those aged 16 and 17 years and not in full-time education or accessing other statutory services are often sparse, with the result that many of this age group simply fall through the gap. By the time they are old enough to access adult services (anywhere between 18 and 21 years depending on the area and service) they are out of touch with services, more reluctant to engage and their problems have escalated.

There are wide differences between children's and adult services and some of the reasons for this are self evident: the young person is still legally classed as a child and so professionals must treat them with child protection and legal responsibilities in mind, consequently young people's services have a responsibility to refer on to other services when their own responsibility ends due to the young person's age. Most adult services do not carry the same legal obligations. Furthermore, there is often a different ethos to young people's services than to adult services, with the former undertaking a much wider range of support, education and prevention work, and adult services often being based more on treating existing issues.

1.2 Risk and Protective Factors

The risk factors applicable to all young people and adults still stand during this time, however a number of these may be exacerbated by the transition between young people's and adult services. The following factors are those which are especially relevant at this point.

RISK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Becoming lost in the system Nobody to ensure attendance Peer substance use Low expectations Independence at an early age
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PROTECTIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitional key worker Gradual transition Access to wide range of services Supportive adult friend(s) Access to life skills services
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2. Issues

Of particular importance during this time are those issues that relate to the (dis)continuity and (in)consistency of care and to 'mild' or low-level problematic behaviours. Because the threshold at which one can access an intervention tends to be much lower for young people than it is for adults, once individuals become an adult, they may not be able to access interventions or support for the same things that they were able to as a young person, for example life skills or befriending projects. Thus the interventions and support that they were receiving may stop, regardless of their needs.

2.1 General Services

Where there are poor links between children's and adult services, clients may not be transferred when appropriate and therefore may not continue to receive the service they require. Many young people deteriorate on entering adult services, simply because the provision is very different to that within young people's services. Confidence is a major issue for young people attending their first appointment at an adult service, to be treated as an adult and be mixing with other adults - often much older - can be extremely intimidating. Non-attendance at adult services are often not followed up to the same degree as they would be in a young people's service. The client has to want to attend the service and take responsibility for turning up. Young people of this age tend to have a more chaotic lifestyle in general. If services aren't there, then it is easy for them to fall between.

Given that the threshold of access to young people's services is generally much lower than the threshold to adult services (that is: the young person's need or problem may be much milder than an adult's in order to access a specialist service), not all individuals in receipt of a service as a young person will be able to continue to access an intervention as an adult. Thus work with those young people at the upper age limit of a service must incorporate an exit strategy that allows for the *ending* of an intervention, as well as an exit strategy that allows for the move to adult services.

Young people in local authority care can face even more difficult transitions. A significant number of young people remain in care beyond their 16th birthday and leave somewhere between 16 and 18 years of age. Most of these young people are expected to live independently in the community and need support until they are 21 years of age. These care leavers experience the same challenges that young people in general of this age group have to deal with, however they will also experience the additional challenges of learning to live independently after receiving daily support, often having low levels of educational attainment and a number having special needs and/or behavioural issues. Where any young person has housing issues and loses the support of regular service contact, they may well become chaotic and end up homeless.

2.2 Specialist Substance Use Services

Young people's and adult substance use services differ in their whole approach: young people's services tend to focus more on education and the prevention of escalation of substance use, whereas adult services are geared more towards harm reduction and treatment approaches. Unsurprisingly, there is scope for considerable problems in transition from one to the other.

Aligned to this, is the issue of definitions of problematic substance use for young people and for adults: a proportion of the young people who access specialist substance use services do not have the levels of opiate, stimulant or alcohol use that would warrant a specialist intervention if they were an adult. What is regarded as problematic substance use requiring a specialist intervention for a young person, is not necessarily sufficient to access treatment services for an adult. Consequently, for young people who access services for high levels of - for example - cannabis use, there is no equivalent adult service to refer on to.

The location of service provision varies between young people's and adult services. The majority of adult

services expect clients to come to their premises and the responsibility for attendance at services is placed with the individual; in young people's services the emphasis is placed more on working around the client. Depending on their needs, the young people may be met away from the service, at least initially, particularly as young people may be wary of attending a substance use service. Younger clients may be escorted to a service for their safety and to encourage them to attend. Adult services often only open 9 to 5, whilst young people's services may operate into early evening with scope for later appointments and some weekend provision.

It is important not to encourage young people that they will automatically require another service when they reach adulthood, many will not require continued contact with a drugs agency, particularly given that adult provision is largely treatment based. What young people often require are general befriending or learning life skills support. However these services tend to be lacking for over 19s unless they have encountered particular issues, such as having been in care or abused.

For many of those in contact with young people's substance use services, substance use is not their primary issue, many also have mental health problems, education or employment issues, may have been in care and been homeless at some point. A drugs worker could well be their only regular contact and will be especially significant where they play a caring and supporting role.

3. The Actual Transition

Preparation for a smooth transition from young people's to adult services should ideally begin at least six months before they are due to leave the service. Workers should meet with the young person to reach an agreement on what services they feel will need and to ensure that they understand any differences in the provision between the service they currently receive and that provided by adult services. This can be further facilitated by a joint meeting between the young person, their current worker and a worker from the adult service. Preparation should involve ensuring that the young person understands that they will have to act independently and take responsibility for their own attendance at services and their own compliance with interventions offered. Workers should accompany individuals to their first appointment at the adult service, both to provide support and to ensure that they attend. Although a joint meeting immediately before and after the transition with workers from both services can help support the individual, they should not be encouraged to continue accessing the young person's service, once their intervention with the adult service has begun. All agencies involved in an individual's welfare should be made aware in advance of the transition and a clear date of change set so that everyone is aware of who to contact and so that relevant case notes are held by the right service. Any prior and ongoing joint working should be picked up by the adult service with explanations of the remit and boundaries of this to both the individual and other agencies they are involved with.

4. Interventions

Where young people are already in contact with at least one service during the transition between children's and adult services, the likelihood of them being able to access other adult services is greatly increased. Interventions to support transition might include:

- ▶ Accompaniment to adult service on first visit *or*
- ▶ First appointment with the adult worker held at the young person's service
- ▶ Clear information for young people of what services they are entitled to as an adult, what these services can offer and how to access them
- ▶ Care plan, which includes an exit strategy from the young person's service (and an entry strategy into the appropriate adult service if necessary) where the client is approaching the cut-off age
- ▶ Retention of the client within the young person's service where there is no appropriate adult service to take them - although there must be a clear protocol as to when and why this would happen to prevent the young person's service becoming clogged up with over age clients.

Merseyside Accommodation Project - Liverpool

Merseyside Accommodation Project (MAP) is a voluntary sector service which works in conjunction with Social Services to provide supported lodgings for homeless 16 and 17 year olds, with local householders who have a spare room and can provide the young person with support. All volunteers are police checked and must provide references before they are accepted. The service is designed to be a step towards independent living for young people who lack the confidence and knowledge to live on their own.

MAP staff - social workers and counsellors - work with the young people on confidence building, life skills and health programmes and are on-call if either the young person or the householder experience problems. All placements are monitored by staff to ensure that they are suitable for both parties.

The majority of young people stay for 6 months and are then helped to find tenancies via links with local housing providers. Approximately a quarter of the 150 young people placed at any one time are care leavers. MAP also have links with careers and employment services and other voluntary sector support agencies.

MAP is funded by the local authorities, housing benefit and grant-making trusts and is monitored and assessed by the Social Services departments it works with.

**It is the intention of the case studies simply to illustrate current work. Additional case studies will be used for the final project report & suggestions for these are welcomed. Please contact Paul or Karen at the address below.*

4. Conclusion

The shift from young people's to adult services is complicated and the differences in ethos, provision and age boundaries add to that complexity. For young people moving to an adult service - regardless of whether that is substance use specific or other - they must adjust to differences in the way the service is provided and learn to take responsibility for their own attendance and compliance to a much greater degree. Close working between adult services and the young people's services with clients ready to move onto them can greatly facilitate the change and ensure that an individual continues to attend services and to receive the interventions they need.

5. Update Number Eight

The next Update will be sent out after the summer and will focus upon issues regarding information sharing for services that work with young people. If you have any comments to make in relation to these or any other issues, please contact us, we would be happy to hear from you.

6. Contact Details

Risk and Response is being carried out by the Research Department of Lifeline Projects. The key staff currently working on the project are:

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