

Parent Partnership Service Cheshire East

Spring 2014 Newsletter

For parents and carers of children who have special educational needs

Transition to adult life...from a parent's perspective...

"What happens when my child leaves school?" all parents want this question answered. However, when your child has a disability or an additional, need this question may need far more planning before it can be answered.

I have just begun this process with my own son. He has Asperger's, Tourette's syndrome, ocd, adhd and dyspraxia .He has always managed to stay in mainstream education, with a lot of support...25 hours throughout high school ,which lessened when he entered the sixth form to enable him to try to become more independent and ready himself for choices he might want to make in the coming years.

For us it has always been about planning and looking ahead...when he was in years 7 & 8,we were already thinking about how he would access GCSE's, so conversations were had with his SENCO to ensure exam arrangements were in place and he had access to the correct support for him. By year 9, options were being made and of course my son had not a clue about many of the subjects on the list...as they had never been done in the lower school! It helped to work backwards...what would he like to do? We encouraged him to look through college prospectuses .His careers officer (connexions/youth support) was a great source of support here - he offered my son extra sessions to go through each subject with him, they planned in that they would sit in on lessons that were unfamiliar to him and those he liked ...this helped him to decide and make his choices more informed as he had 'seen' the lessons he would take part in. He was able to choose subjects that would link in with the courses he liked the look of later...he was encouraged ,like everyone else, to try not to be too specialised with his choices ,so as to not disadvantage himself later, should he change his mind!

Gcse's almost over... end of year 10 and into year 11 ...discussions had with youth support worker again...what next? Should he go to a specialised college to help support his Asperger's? Should he go to a local college that could support his social skills? Should he try to get an apprenticeship? How about staying on and doing A- levels? So many choices, we as parents were overwhelmed, no wonder our son needed extra support to get through all of this!

He finally decided on A-levels as he'd done well enough in his GCSE's to merit doing so. Meanwhile, 'Mum was on a mission' ... I toured colleges, universities, went to open days, events such as 'Kids up North' where I could speak to representatives from a variety of colleges. I spoke to many professionals involved with him from the L.A. and also the teams that might support him such as social care and supported employment, should he choose that route.

The choice was ultimately with my son; his life, his choice; his first steps to independence! Eek! He made a shortlist from those that I had shared with him and visited two universities... one took three visits to just get him through the door!

The university he decided on was welcoming from the start. They treated him as an adult; spoke to him with respect and with interest. He attended two open days to look round, as he couldn't manage to view everything in one go. We listened to a student share their experience and an insight into the course he was interested in and we visited just what was important to him... the food hall! He met with his course

tutor before he started and was able to ask many questions. He also had a tour of the area that he would be using once he started.

The staff from the university; were able to support my son with his application, help him apply for D.S.A. (disabled students allowance) and explained that he would need an assessment to identify exactly the support he would need to be successful. This included a laptop with specialised software, a note taker, a mentor, a mental health mentor and he also had a buddy in his early days to show him around. They provided workshops to help support his transition to university life .Staff from the enabling centre are available for him throughout the day, should he have any concerns or worries.

As my son decided to live in at uni, he needed a care package to support his independent living needs. A social worker met with him and carried out an assessment to discover just what he needed support with and to determine how best to do this. It was decided that care provider would be enlisted to provide carers to check on him twice daily and for longer periods during his study day. The carers are there to support him to independently shop, cook, clean his room and do his washing as well as prompt him to take his medication and ensure he ready for the day.

So far, all of this support has been invaluable to him, ensuring his success with his degree. He has just come home at the end of his first semester and declared it to be... "The best time I've ever had!". While I understand that my son's experience will not be the same as other teenagers; as not everyone wants to, or is able to go to university...it is important to understand that there are things available out there for our kids to do, they can join in, they can access the provisions and support that they need to lead a fulfilling adult life, it's a matter of finding what fits your child as one size does not fit all. Good luck!

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