

Learning from the Choice and Control Project in 0-25 Together

Over the past few years, 0-25 Together and SEND Brokerage teams have been introducing a strengths-based approach to our social care work with disabled children, young people and their families. In 2018 we began our 'Choice and Control Project' which was based on the same values as the Connected Lives approach in Adult Care Services. This article explains more about the approach and the impact it has had.

What is 'Connected Lives'?

Connected Lives begins by understanding our young people and family's interests, goals and aspirations. A social care worker will have met the young person prior to a review meeting to listen to his/her wishes and feelings.

The approach involves a different conversation between families and the social care worker in which creating the right support includes exploring the role of the extended family, informal support networks and resources in the community, as well as specialist services. The conversation identifies what is working well and where there are strengths and assets, as well as what is not working well or where there are needs.

The approach recognises the need for specialist services and aims to create a better balance of person-centred experiences and maximise opportunities for inclusion and independence for the disabled young person.

Research has shown the positive benefits for health and wellbeing arising from being connected to people and places. Starting as early as possible helps with preparation for adulthood.

Which families were involved?


52 families whose child attended one of the overnight short break services were offered a Choice and Control review from the summer of 2018 through to the autumn of 2019. The parents/carers were asked for feedback following the reviews and the outcomes for the young person were monitored to help the service learn and improve its approach. During that time, 43 other families were also offered community navigation support. Now the approach is expected to form part of all the planning and review conversations with families who are receiving support through the 0-25 Together service.

What outcomes were achieved?

Outcomes for 50 families in the Choice and Control project have been evaluated. 17 young people tried new activities in the community in pursuit of their interests and 15 of those found activities they could participate in.

Many families said they weren't aware of what was available locally and appreciated the research that had been undertaken.

Activities chosen were:



You opened doors
to community
activities away from
blue screens

- autism friendly cinema
- parks, countryside walks
- travel training
- one off outings
- Mencap youth club, school based after school club
- cooking
- swimming, bowling, climbing
- trampolining, horse riding, football club, special needs sports club
- shopping
- Para Dance wheelchair dancing
- Pokémon social group via social media

Most young people were already accessing plenty of activities and didn't want to change those.

He has grown in confidence and likes the 1:1 attention from the direct payment worker

Some young people wanted to continue with their existing activities but to do them more independently from their parents.

New activities were taken up more readily by young people aged 13 plus, by young people whose disabilities did not include having autism, or having autism but no learning difficulty, and being female or from a BAME background.

Some families identified better outcomes by changing their specialist support including overnight breaks, SBLO, homecare or direct payments. The Choice and Control approach enabled a thorough conversation resulting in the right service being provided at the right time. Examples included:

Young people who wanted to develop social interactions with their peers but were unable to do this in the overnight short breaks settings and therefore changed their support for individual support workers in the community to take them to activities such as climbing and horse-riding where they could meet similar young people, while their parents had a break from caring.

Young people who wanted to develop independence skills and to support their preparation for adulthood decided to get their support from individual support workers in the community who could offer travel training to enable them to access community places safely, planning trips out, going shopping, going to cooking clubs etc

Young people who were not sleeping well benefitted from increased activity in the evenings and this wasn't always possible at overnight short breaks and the breaks were not very often. Changing to support to take part in after school clubs and activities supported improved sleep more often.

What did parent carers think?

The following positive comments were mentioned by many parent carers about their experience of the Choice and Control review and/or the outcomes for their young person:

- Supportive positive experience
- Confident in outcomes for CYP
- New activities
- Socially included
- Positive future
- More tailored support

- Good to get out more
- Happy with OSB & SBLO
- Lots of options and choices
- Good suggestions
- Focussed on young person
- Felt listened to
- Questions answered and information provided

A few negatives were raised which were individual comments:

- No benefits / changes from review
- Wasn't structured well
- Suggestions not suitable
- Factsheet for YP wasn't relevant
- Wanted a focus on transition

And there was one great suggestion from one of the fathers:

- Workers should use ICT in reviews for more impact (e.g. tablets)

Next steps

The service has engaged with partners and stakeholders for feedback and is holding workshops for teams to identify enablers and any further developments to ensure the Connected Lives approach can be embedded successfully across the system. Activity may focus on developing the workforce, developing the community navigation offer, market development and community capacity building. Any further development activity will continue to be co-produced with parent carers and young people.