



ASPIRATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
– MOVING ON AFTER SCHOOL

Introduction

Young Healthwatch South Tyneside independently reviews services in South Tyneside to ensure young people are given a voice and recommendations based on their needs are heard and used to improve services they receive. YHST worked together with Your Voice Counts, which ensures people with learning disabilities are heard.

In April 2018 YHST was asked to support South Tyneside Council's Adult Social Care service, which is currently reviewing its transition approaches for young people making the transition into adulthood. STC wants to ensure that young people, parents and carers with Special Educational Needs (SEND) have a voice in how they want to be supported in the future and what improvements need to be made in relation to progression to employment.

Background

There are many emerging policy changes that will affect the lives of young people with SEN, disabled young people and their families, and will impact on the range and quality of support available to them as they prepare for adulthood. The two pieces of legislation that will have the greatest influence on support for disabled young people preparing for adulthood are Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, which focuses on Special Educational Needs and Disability, and Part 1 of the Care Act, which focuses on the care and support of adults with care and support needs, implemented in 2015.

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduces a system of support which extends from birth to 25, while the Care Act deals with adult social care for anyone over the age of 18. The Care Act says that if a child, young carer or an adult caring for a child is likely to have needs when they, or the child they care for, turns 18, the local authority must assess them if it considers there is 'significant benefit' to the individual in doing so. This is regardless of whether the child or individual currently receives any services.

Part 3 of the Children and Families Act transforms the system for disabled children and young people and those with SEN, so that services consistently support the best outcomes for them. The reforms create a system from birth to 25 through the development of coordinated assessment and single Education, Health and Care Plans; improving cooperation between all services responsible for providing education, health or social care; and giving parents and young people greater choice and control over their support.

The SEND reforms focus on the following themes:

- Working towards clearly defined outcomes.
- Engagement and participation of parents and young people.
- Joint Commissioning and developing a Local Offer of support.
- Coordinated assessments and Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Personalisation and personal budgets.

Preparation for adulthood is a key element of the reforms that runs across all of these themes.

What is the local picture in South Tyneside for children and young people with SEND and how can we better prepare them for adulthood?

“To help South Tyneside Council better meet the needs of children and young people and in order to ensure that young people (who have physical and or cognitive illness/impairments/disabilities) who are reaching adulthood are supported through that transition. We have been changing our practices in order to become involved sooner and provide information, advice and guidance in a more timely fashion. Where the young person is likely to be eligible under the Care Act we allocate an adult Social Worker at least one year before the person’s 18th birthday and we ensure that the assessment under the Care Act is completed by their 18th birthday. The young person and their family will know what support is going to be in place, to maximise their independence, ahead of that birthday. We will ensure that there is no real or perceived ‘cliff edge’ for young people and their families.”

Clare Ault, Service Manager for Learning Disabilities, Mental Health and Safeguarding, South Tyneside Council

Area of Improvement – Preparation for adulthood

The preparation for adulthood is a key element that overlaps in each area of the SEND reforms. It is also an area of improvement for South Tyneside Council that has been clear from audits and discussions with young working age adults that employment pathways are not clear and that there is little aspiration beyond ‘voluntary work’.

In April 2018, this evidence was further strengthened when Young Healthwatch and Your Voice Counts held our first parents'/carers' meeting of children with various ranges of disabilities and SEND, and the following areas were identified.

- **No clear pathway of support for transition that was not just voluntary work for young people after school.**
- **Parents or the young person not being involved in policies or pathways that affect their child or young person.**
- **The reduction of independent travel training a further barrier to a young person's employment or opportunities for long term independence into adulthood.**
- **The young person not being asked what they wanted to do after school and assumptions being made by social workers, or the question simply not being asked.**

It is hoped that by carrying out engagement work with young people alongside partnership organisations such as Young Healthwatch and Your Voice Counts with young people and parents/carers it will assist us to understand not only what people want us to focus on but also some of the barriers to independence, so that the steering groups for employment and transitions can address the issues raised.

The way forward

To help address some of the issues, the group has met bi-monthly to help parents and carers become more informed of what is happening that affects their children and young people. This has included regular updates from Clare Ault about changes afoot, involvement in the employment subgroup, addressing extensive issues around SEND transport with the Commissioning team and Andy Richie (Manager of SEND).

One of the key gaps parents identified was that young people with SEND were not always asked about their goals and aspirations and what support they felt they needed to help them progress into adulthood. Young Healthwatch and Your Voice wanted to ensure they got an opportunity to do that.

What we did

To help us ask young people what they wanted to do after they left school, we felt it was important that we asked a sample of young people this as part of their school day in an independent session so responses could be as transparent as possible. We also felt it was important to help the young people talk more openly and widely about their goals and aspirations. It is sometimes easier to do this when you talk in the third person rather than about yourself.

We decided the best way to do this was to deliver a one hour workshop across selected SEND schools in South Tyneside. The schools we used to deliver the workshops were:

- Epinay School
- Keelmans Way
- Bamburgh School

We spoke to **75 young people aged 13 to 19** who were in their last year at school or in sixth form provision to identify what their goals and aspirations were after leaving school, who they felt could support them to achieve these and what barriers they felt stopped them achieving what they wanted to do in the future.

We created a workshop called "*What about Bob*". This was an interactive session where the young people had to really get involved to create a new classmate and bring a character to life.

The group had to choose a fellow classmate who would be drawn around; this created a great ice breaker and trust within the group to prepare them for discussion. It enabled each young person in the group to participate and be imaginative with the character as they were asked to name him, give him character from hair colour to his size of ears, eyes, mouth, to body parts such as a heart.

This also allowed the group to recognise everyone is different and for some to be able to recognise this was ok and by creating a third person made it an easier way to talk about goals and aspirations as they were talking about someone else rather than themselves.

'What about Bob' session

Session plan

To get students with SEND to think about what they would like to do when they leave school (outline of how to deliver the session):

1. Introduce ourselves, who we are, why we are there. Keeping it simple for each SEND need.
2. Roll out a long piece of flip chart, get the class to nominate a classmate who would like to be drawn around to create a new member of the class.
3. Draw around the classmate then ask the class to annotate the body, name, hair colours, eyes, nose etc.
4. Ask the group how BOB or named new classmate is feeling about leaving school? (Get the group to explore emotions that are felt).
5. What does BOB want to do when he leaves school (for example, go to college, go to a new club?)
6. What do you think might stop BOB from doing this (for example, he can't get there on his own, he doesn't know who to ask?)
7. Ask the group for ideas of who can help them do the things they want to when they leave school?
8. Do they need any extra help with this, do they know where to get that help?
9. Close the session by telling the group we are taking the new classmate back with us and are going to use it so people that support young people know what they want when they leave school and how they can best help them.

As part of each workshop we asked each of the groups how their new classmate felt about leaving school. As you can see from the session findings much of the feelings were strong negative emotions such as:

We asked the group what things BOB does during his spare time and also were there activities they liked to do in their spare time.

What you told us

Less than a quarter of the young people we spoke to were attending groups or clubs outside of the school environment, were attending after school clubs that were provided by school. One young person stated *“I only really see my friends when I am at school”* and parents in the parent forum group echoed this *“they don’t really see anyone because they are picked up to and from school, this isolates them from other friendship groups.”*

When young people were being asked what they like to do when they are not at school some were able to identify with themselves and the types of things or clubs they were able to attend.

In particular at Bamburgh and Epinay they were able to discuss what clubs they would like to see available to them for example; smaller clubs with different activities such as job skills groups, courses to build confidence.

They were also able to identify there are no longer community centres open late enough with smaller numbers, with different activities for them to take part in as some stated there were too many people, most of their friends didn’t go.

A strong theme throughout alternative activities was lack of support to do it, lack of places to go for them, public activities such as swimming or football clubs being too busy or loud for them to want to attend.

We then asked each group what they would like to do when they left school. In each school it was evident they were giving examples of themselves and that they had really thought about what they wanted to do, for example a vet, be a mechanic or go in the Army or other Armed Forces.

There were strong examples that the young people were able to identify they would need to get good exam results, go to college, get a work placement or gain experience with animals or cars. In some cases they were able to identify where they may be able to do this but when identifying some of the barriers suggested their disability, such as hearing or physical disability, and not knowing who would help them to do this was a key theme throughout all three sessions. It was inspiring that they had thought about this but equally very sad that many young people felt they would not achieve this because of their disability or due to lack of individual support and guidance.

The barriers to my goals

The main themes that were identified when asking young people what the barriers might stop their new classmate achieving their goals were:

- lack of family support or support from others
- not getting the right grades
- their disability or medical conditions
- low confidence, not thinking they can do it
- organisations not wanting them because of their disability.

Here are some quotes from the workshops this evidence again strengthens evidence that young people with SEND do have understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and identify with the fact that their disability or condition may affect their chances of reaching their full potential and being able to achieve what they want to.

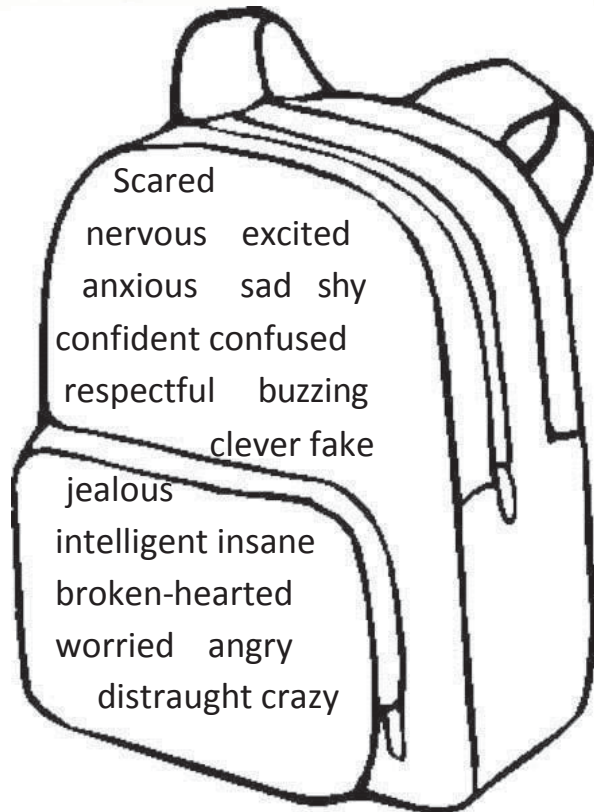


Everybody carries an emotional backpack that holds the weight of certain life experiences. Leaving school is an emotional journey for most children. We asked our three groups how they thought their character felt about leaving school. These are the common emotions from each school.



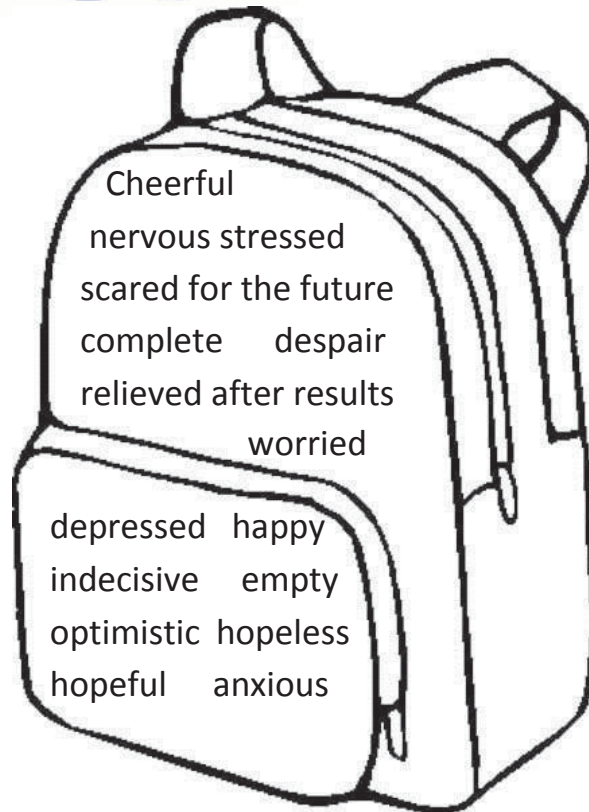
Eddy

Epinau School



Tommy

Bamburgh School



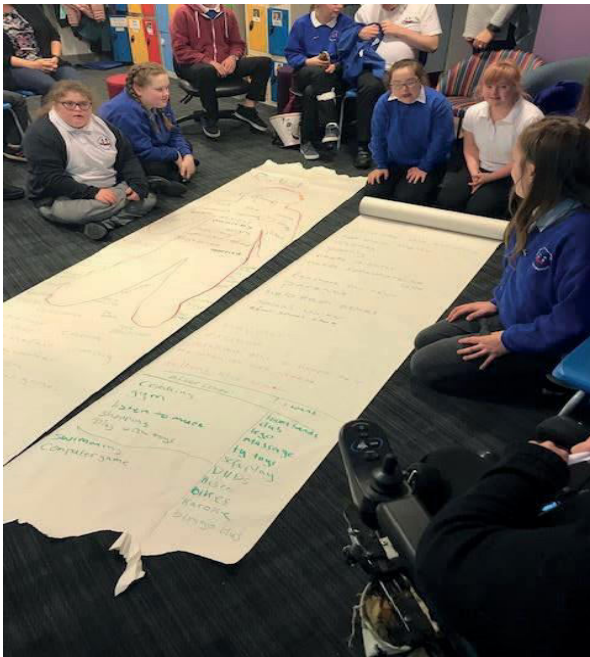
Ruby

Keelman's Way



Date: 15/10/18

Keelman's Way School



The children at Keelman's school named their new classmate – Ruby. They annotated her with orange hair, green eyes, pink lips, a small nose, big ears and glasses. The group also said she had a big heart.

We asked the group what Ruby felt like about leaving school?

The group shouted out words: shy; sad; anxious; nervous; afraid; panicky; scared; frightened; worried; angry; happy; proud; excited; squirmy; agitated.

The group came up with some great words to describe how they are feeling about leaving school. Overall, the way the group felt about leaving school was negative emotions linked to worrying about what might happen next.

The group then described what Ruby might like to do when she left school?

This included jobs like becoming a footballer, playing cricket, a vet, a soft play worker, a hairdresser, going to college, work in travel, going shopping at the Metro Centre, movie star, go to prom, a singer, a nurse, work in a café, a dog walker, work at the fair, be in a choir, a chef, get married and have a family.

One young person said “I would like to get married”, demonstrating that young people with SEND have the same aspirations of happiness and long-term goals of settling down as others and this should be supported.

As well as jobs the group also shouted out activities they would like to do outside of school. These activities included: cooking clubs; massage clubs; bingo clubs; the gym; a bike club; Lego clubs; watching DVDs or films; playing with toys; playing on computer games; going to a disco; singing on karaoke; shopping, seeing friends.

We asked the group what might stop Ruby doing some of these things?

The key things were:

- Having too much choice, not being able to decide what they wanted to do
- Not enough choice because of my disability.
- Transport
- Not enough money
- They are poorly.
- Need a carer to get them there
- Someone said they might not have anywhere to live when they finish school.

We asked the group to think about who might help them or Ruby achieve what they want to when they finish school?

- Social Worker
- Friends
- Might need travel training to get them to a place
- Parents/Carer
- We can help each other.

Lastly, we asked the group how this might make Ruby feel about leaving school if she got the right help?

- Happier / Interested
- Not worried
- Excited

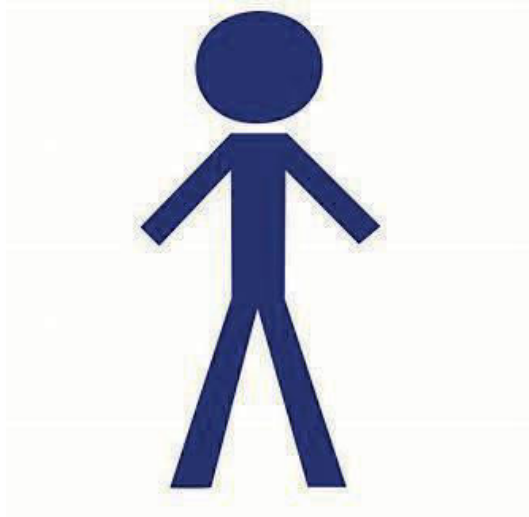
We closed the session by thanking the young people involved, and explained the information would be used to help the people at South Tyneside Council understand how they can help young people better when they leave school. The group was happy that they had been part of the session to make changes that will help them with their future. We explained we planned to visit other schools to get their views also.

One of the key messages through the sessions was is that if a young person with SEND is able to be supported to recognise their abilities as well as their limitations, with the right and support and planning from social care professionals each young person's aspirations can be achieved.

When asking the young people who would support them to achieve these goals most of the group identified friends, family and/or school but when asked if a social worker would support them, they either said "no", "not sure" or "my social worker just makes things worse".

Date 15/11/18

Epinay School



The group named their new classmate – Eddy

We asked the group what Eddy felt like about leaving school?

The group shouted out words: shy; confident; confused; respectful; buzzing; jealous; clever; intelligent; broken-hearted; insane; crazy; mental; distraught; petrified; annoyed; lost; angry; they would put on a fake face; worried; raging; sad; scared; anxious; nervous; excited.

The group came up with some great words to describe how they are feeling about leaving school. Overall, the common theme the group felt about leaving school were negative emotions linked to worry about what might happen next.

We asked the group what might stop Eddy doing these things?

The key things were: your own attitude and attitude of others; drugs; having tattoos; diabetes; asthma; a criminal record; needing carers; your health; bad memories; friends; money; your family; your wife; capabilities; your disability.

We asked the group to think about who might help them achieve what they want to when they finish school?

- Doctors Support groups
- Friends Hotlines
- Peers Listening to music
- Teachers Self - help therapies
- Family Carers Social Worker (when young people spoke about social worker support some stated that this support was not always helpful).

We then asked the group if they didn't have a disability what they would like to do?

This was difficult for some of the young people to grasp as many live in the here and now but many said they would like to work in emergency services, public services and the forces.

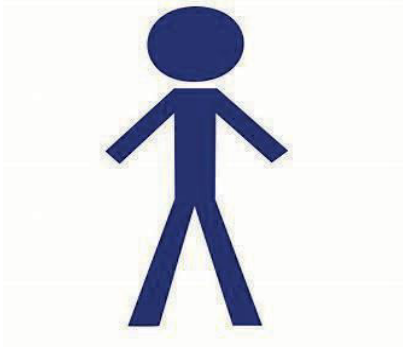
We asked the group what they would like support with when they leave school?

- Disability specific – where jobs can be tailored for them accordingly
- Better options/apprenticeship support
- Support building confidence/self-belief

We closed the session by thanking the young people involved, we explained the information would be used to help South Tyneside Council understand how it can help young people do better when they leave school.

Date: 06/02/19

Bamburgh School



Bamburgh School students named their new classmate Tommy. The group were keen to give Tommy a strong identity with a Gucci belt, big blue eyes, curly blonde hair and pink boots.

We asked the group about how Tommy felt about leaving school.

Happy, nervous, scared for the future, stressed, relieved after his exam results, upset, worried despair, depressed, relieved, indecisive, complete, cheerful, optimistic, hopeless, hopeful, empty, anxious, angry.

They talked about things they would like to do or have in South Tyneside and things they and Tommy might like to do:

- Counselling services that are more accessible to people.
- A special place to gain qualifications outside of school that was safe.
- More out of school clubs or courses to help build my confidence.
- Lots of community centres and youth clubs have gone and are too overcrowded these would be better with smaller groups.
- Opening times for activities/youth groups to be open later.
- Everyone deserves a chance to join in different groups.
- Swimming pools to have better opening times.
- More mixed clubs to meet friends.
- Costs are too high for clubs/activities - more discounts.
- Safer parks, girls' football teams, running clubs, kids' gym, more drama groups, Saturday clubs.
- More taster sessions for worker experience from a younger age, eg 14-plus.

What might stop Tommy from achieving the things he wants to do?

The key things were: not being confident; no independence; no independent travel training; the cost; not wanting to leave friends or family; having to move away from home; eye sight; hearing; no family support; not feeling good enough; not being taken seriously; your health problems; missing friends; not getting the grades I need; anxiety; bad memories; people thinking I can't do it. Many members of the group lacked confidence and felt things would stop them.

Who might be able to help them achieve their goals?

Some of the group struggled to think about this but said the following people would be able to help them: teacher; friends; family; other people in the job, a social worker was mentioned but some were unsure if they would help them so we left this with a question mark).

We closed the session by thanking the young people involved, we explained the information would be used to help South Tyneside Council to understand how it can help young people do better when they leave school.

Some young people felt they were supported through school to think about careers and work experience but one young person stated "it's hard for me to find a work placement", and another said "I would like an apprenticeship".

Lessons learnt from workshops

When we initially set about creating Bob in the third person it was to enable the young people to be able to talk more openly by creating an imaginary person and allow them to share their own goals and aspirations through the medium of the third person. However, in doing so we identified the following areas we would improve:

1. By creating a third person imaginary figure some young people came up with ideas for future careers that in some cases were too imaginary and unrealistic. However, with that said, support staff and social workers could use this as a goal motivator and break it down into more realistic SMART goals on a case by case basis. This in turn will raise a young person's self-belief and confidence in achieving goals throughout adulthood.
2. We also noted after completing the first workshop that in fact we were also guilty of not asking young people with SEND the direct question of "what they want to do when they leave school?"
3. We learnt from the workshops it is key the right conversation professionals have with young people with SEND do not make assumptions that they don't understand or have not thought about their future. An example of this was in workshop 3 when we changed the focus from the third person and asked the group "We have thought about what Bob might want to do when leaving school but what would you like to do?"

This demonstrated a very passionate different dialogue from the group with the young people providing “real” examples or careers and in particular activities they would like to get involved in such as, mechanics, Armed Forces, apprenticeships, the arts.

Throughout each workshop it seemed as if a young person could identify as being part of a group or a club already, either within school or in the community. It was easier for them to identify with future goals as they already felt part of something and had increased confidence and self-esteem making achieving other goals feel more possible, such as a drama or music club.

Another common theme throughout the workshops was that many of the young people hadn’t really thought past where they would get support for their future goals or employment.

For those that had goals they wanted somewhere to go or someone to talk to about it. Examples were: a specialist centre; special apprenticeships; or work experience - places for people with different disabilities.

Recommendations to ensure young people with SEND can successfully move forward to a better future into adulthood.

Ask children and young people ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’ Ensure that they know that getting a job is an expectation not an aspiration; don’t avoid the question just because a child or young person has SEND.

1. Commissioners, stakeholders, statutory services and the third sector should consider using the “What about Bob” workshop as a tool for both professionals in schools, colleges and assessments including parents and carers to help support them to have the conversation about a young person’s aspirations and employment goals to assist with planning realistic SMART goals for their future at the earliest opportunity.
2. Commissioners, stakeholders and the third sector organisations should consider when planning community groups or activities for children and young people with SEND that groups should be smaller, and more evening and weekend activities should be made available in future plans to encourage more community inclusion and prevent isolation.
3. Consider a dedicated Transition Officer to deliver sessions on self-confidence, work experience skills, setting SMART targets for next steps into education and employment options.

4. Work in partnership with the Jobcentre, NHS, the forces to create taster workshops in popular careers options for people with SEND.
5. Dedicated apprenticeship options for children and young people with SEND.
6. Consider using direct payments as part of a transition package to support individual young people to achieve their education and employment goals for additional support such as, support workers and independent travel training.
7. Schools need to build careers into the curriculum at an earlier age to help match career goals to work experience giving them a wider range of options that match their goals.
8. Commissioners, schools and partnership organisations need to build stronger relationships with training providers and employers to offer more employment options for young people with SEND.

Special thanks

Young Healthwatch would like to thank the following partner organisations for their input during this piece of work including: Your Voice Counts; Parents and Carers from the Stronger Together parent and carer forum; and Clare Ault from South Tyneside Council for asking us to ensure young people have a voice in their future.

Most importantly we would like to thank all of the children and staff from Keelman's Way School, Bamburgh School and Epinay School for all their fantastic ideas on how things can be better for them in the future. It was a pleasure working with you!

