



Professionals Guide to Next Step Project

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Date compiled: 01 December 2015

Introduction

Our philosophy at Evolution Children Services is to place the needs of the young people at the heart of our services by promoting independence and providing support that respects young people's choice, rights, privacy and dignity.

Evolution Children Services aims to provide the highest levels of support and service to enable young people to achieve their goals. We do this by ensuring our staff are recruited, vetted and trained against a strict framework with emphasis placed on the quality and continuity of our workers to provide a stable and secure environment for all young people.

We are committed to working flexibly and imaginatively with all other professionals and families to ensure the best interests of every young person are consistently served.

Our policies and procedures are written to provide safe services and working practices that help protect both young people and staff.

We recognise the need for client and family choice and proactively encourage involvement during the planning and delivery of service and ensure that the service is managed and delivered in a way which meets the needs of the individuals concerned.

We ensure all parties are kept fully informed at all times with up to date information which allows young people and their families, to make informed choices concerning their support while living in the project. Information can be made available in the most appropriate language or format required.

We are unreservedly committed to the principles and practices of equality. Our policy on equality and diversity is reflected in all aspects of our service to ensure we accommodate and respect all aspects of ethnic, religious and cultural groups being sensitive to their specific needs.

Our quality assurance programme ensures regular quality and performance appraisals are conducted with both young people and carers. In addition, our formal complaints, disciplinary, grievance and whistle blowing procedures ensure we are able to capture information to plan and implement on-going improvements to our services.

About Next Step

Next Step is situated to the west of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a large terraced house offering a safe, warm and comfortable environment to six young male residents, between the ages of 16 and 18 years.

Ethos of Next Step.

The ethos of the project incorporates the following beliefs,

- That each young person should be viewed as an individual and that their views, attitudes and opinions are respected.
- That young people are experts on themselves, therefore they should be actively involved in decision making about their lives.
- Young people should be empowered to take ownership of their lives
- That young people make mistakes; experience, help and guidance will empower and enable them.

Aims of Next Step

The aim of the service is to support young people who are leaving care with the next step to independence and prepare them for living on their own, in their own tenancy. This will include giving support and guidance to enable them to move on and have the confidence to meet the following outcomes:

- Develop as an individual
- Take responsibility for their own development
- Make their own decisions
- Sustain a tenancy
- Manage household bills and budgets
- Access education, training, apprenticeships and employment opportunities
- Access appropriate benefits
- Access health services
- Complete domestic tasks such as cleaning, washing, budgeting, shopping and cooking meals
- Access leisure and social activities
- Develop social and community awareness through involvement with local groups
- Re-connect with their family, friends and local community

These aims are achieved through providing the following:

Accommodation

The provision of quality accommodation offering comfort, homeliness, safety and privacy in a young person centred environment. Each young person will have their own “flat let” comprising

of sleeping area, desk area for study, a sitting area with their own fridge and tea and coffee making facilities. The young person will have access to three shared bathroom facilities

Support

Evolution Children Services recognise the need for high quality, well trained and motivated staff. The Next Step team will be available 24/7 to make a young person's experience within the project as positive as possible. Support for the young person will involve strategies geared to meet emotional, social and developmental needs, as well as practical support in relation to the development of life skills. Through participation of our in-house accredited Life Skills Programme young people are able to achieve a Level 2 qualification. The promotion of independence skills along with advice pertaining to health, wellbeing and personal safety will also be paramount.

Individual Support

Each young person will be allocated a member of the team who will take a lead responsibility as their key worker. Careful consideration will be given to this allocation and all possible attempts will be made during the referral and planned admission stage to ensure that the young person has the opportunity to meet his or her key worker and thus begin the process of relationship building and ensuring that at the time of any move, they will have a 'familiar and friendly face' to support them in what, for many young people can be a problematic, frightening and stressful process. The key worker in consultation with the young person will develop a support plan based upon individual need via the means of clear and unambiguous support plans and where appropriate pathway plans undertaken by the local authority pathway planning process will also inform the support plan. The key worker will also support the young person to maintain any links he or she may have with other agencies involved directly or indirectly with them. The key worker will be expected to meet regularly, (usually weekly depending on agreement between the young person and their worker) and all plans, aims and objectives will be discussed to ensure that progress is monitored and that all issues are addressed in a focused and clear fashion with reference at all times to the young person's individual level of understanding and communication style.

Resettlement

Moving into young adult independence is an extremely complex period of a young person's life. At Next Step we recognise the need to continue to offer support at this critical time and to ensure that any move is as smooth and problem free as is reasonably possible. Hopefully this supportive, proactive approach will increase the likelihood that future outcomes for the young person are positive and stable. With this in mind, we will work with our young people to move on to independent accommodation with local authority, a general needs housing association or a private landlord. When the move is completed, the young person will have access to our volunteering and befriending service for extra support, whilst also having access to our on call system at times of emergency or crisis.

What we provide

- Next Step's vision is to work in partnership with local authorities and other responsible bodies to deliver accessible, high quality and needs led services that promote choice, independence and social inclusion and enable vulnerable individuals to live successfully

within the community. The service has been developed in order to improve the progression and distance travelled by young people leaving care on the road to independent living and taking their place within the community.

- The Next Step Project is a specialist support service, which provides support to young people leaving care aged between 16-18 years within a 24 hour supported living accommodation and needs led outreach support for young people who have been allocated their own tenancy.
- The young people referred to the Project will have a needs and risk assessment carried out to assess whether the young person fits the requirements of the project, in order to achieve the best outcomes for the both the individual and other participants.
- The Project promotes equality of opportunity in employment and service delivery regardless of ethnic origin, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, social class or any other relevant personal characteristic or preference. We strive to ensure that the staff team is reflective of the local community and client group and work to meet the requirements of the equalities standards in line with any contractual obligations.
- The Project meets its obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and all regulations, approved codes of practice and guidance relevant to the support service provided, such as a lone working policy and procedure, risk assessments, health and safety policies and procedures.
- The Project Manager will use a range of monitoring systems within the project to ensure compliance with contractual obligations. Due to our experience of operating registered children's homes the systems used in our homes will be implemented in the project to ensure stringent, effective monitoring of the project is undertaken.

Benefits to Local Authority

- A high quality, reliable, needs led service, offering clear provision with defined aims, objectives and targets.
- Measurable and improved outcomes for the benefit of Local authorities and the young people involved.
- A financially competitive service, which may afford large savings on current provision.
- A flexible and proactive service with various levels of support offered, tailored to the needs of the young person.
- Individual support plans based on the needs of the young person. The plans are updated on a regular basis to enable the distance travelled by the young person to be evaluated.
- All staff are qualified to set standards and are subject to enhanced disclosures from the Disclosure and Barring Service
- A staff team who specialise in a number of key areas to deliver a service in house particularly in the following key areas: Health and Wellbeing, Employment and Apprenticeships, Education and Training and Welfare Benefits, Money Management and Accommodation.
- Young people are supported and encouraged to gain access to employment, education, and training and to achieve economic wellbeing whilst accessing meaningful daytime activities as they strive to achieve independence.
- Move on plans to facilitate the progression to individual tenancies. The project has developed partnership working with other agencies that in turn provide follow on accommodation and support facilitating the move on plan.
- A 24 hour support service to ensure service users stay safe and to promote healthy lifestyles
- Service users actively involved in the development of the service

- Monthly feedback and client reviews.
- A service committed to equal opportunities and to promoting equality of access to the organisation's services.

Description of Accommodation

The house is situated to the west of Newcastle. It is a large terraced building built in the 1930's. The accommodation consists of three floors. The ground floor comprises of one large young person's flat let and an administration office. The kitchen is extremely large with a breakfast bar and a dining area for young people. A large utility area provides separate accommodation for laundry facilities, adjacent to this room is a further shower room. To the first floor there is a large room which has been converted into a large shower and bathing facility, this has been designed to meet the specific cultural and religious needs of some of the young people who may be referred to the project. On this floor there are three large flat lets, along with a second bathroom/shower facility and a separate toilet. On the second floor there are two further flat lets and a room which has been designed to offer a crisis bed. All rooms have smoke detectors connected to a central system. Regulation fire doors are in place throughout. There is a CCTV system in operation for safeguarding and security purposes.

Location

The project is ideally situated for all local amenities. There is a public park with a leisure centre, football pitches and tennis courts across the road from the project. There is easy access to local colleges and a thriving and diverse shopping area is approximately 10 minutes walk away, whilst excellent transport links into the city centre are accessible on the doorstep (a journey of no more than 5 minutes), where young people can access a wide range of varied and stimulating activities including, swimming and sporting activities, bowling and cinemas etc.

Referral Criteria

Since we aim to maintain a balance at all times, the acceptance of a young person for placement will be determined following careful assessment and discussion between the management and staff team as a whole. Through the interview and vetting procedures the motivation of young people will be assessed to ascertain their suitability for a placement. Young people will also need to be in or be able to demonstrate their commitment to undertaking some form of education, apprenticeship, training or employment which our staff will support them to achieve.

General Procedure

Initial telephone contact with Evolution Children Services will be made by a local authority, social worker or placement manager.

During this initial contact it is essential to obtain as much information as possible about the young person's current situation and their particular needs. Placements will only be offered to local authorities when a completed referral form is submitted accompanied by sufficient background information to allow a realistic assessment to be made concerning the viability of the placement.

The allocated keyworker will visit the young person in their current placement prior to admission and undertake an interview with the young person. Arrangements should also be made for the young person to visit the project, with their Social Worker, parents or carers where appropriate, as part of a planned introduction.

Admissions Procedure

Effective young person centred admission procedures, which clearly identify a purpose for the placement reduces the tendency for young people to drift. It provides an opportunity for young people to change through collaboration and mutual respect and will assist them in re-establishing themselves in the wider community.

Following admission a placement agreement meeting will be held with all relevant parties, including parents or carers where appropriate, to draw up a written agreement for the placement.

Within the first week of admission an initial assessment will be commenced to develop a clear unambiguous support plan for the young person. The plan will direct the service that the young person will receive.

Rules and Expectations

On admission the young person will meet with their keyworker and will be given a guide giving details of the project's rules and expectations e.g. routines, jobs, complaint procedure etc. The young person will have the opportunity to ask any questions they may have at this stage. New residents will be expected to sign a contract to agree that they understand the rules and expectations of the project. Keyworkers will take responsibility for assisting the young person in their understanding of any information that is issued.

The rules and expectations are few but are required in order to achieve a harmonious living environment for all young people living in the project. We appreciate that on occasions young people may fall short of their agreed compliance with regard to rules and expectations within the project and as such we have developed a warning system which supports them to embrace the opportunity to positively change their behaviour to a more acceptable manner in order to remain a resident within the project. Indeed this compliance would be an ongoing expectation required in order to sustain their own tenancy whilst living independently within the community once they have moved on.

Staffing

The team has been drawn together from a variety of backgrounds and have all been selected for their own individual skills and knowledge bases to ensure that support is offered in key areas to fulfil our aim of delivering a professional support service in house to young people. All have shown the necessary personal qualities and attributes to enable them to provide support to young people. A rigorous and carefully planned recruitment process has been developed to ensure as far as possible, that the team is able to support in a positive and proactive manner. All new workers are subject to a six monthly probationary period. This will allow them to gain a greater understanding of the expectations within the project and the wider organisation as a whole. A clear set of benchmarks are in place to monitor and ensure that levels of expertise have been met and only then will a permanent working contract be gained. All staff have

received mandatory training in the following areas including; Health and Safety, 1st Aid, Fire Safety, Food Safety and Breakaway Techniques. All staff have received training in Safeguarding of both Children and Adults and sexual exploitation. Ongoing training and personal development is encouraged and clear career development pathways are designed to enable all staff members to continuously learn new skills and thus be able to offer a greater level of expertise to the young people. A range of training opportunities will be available to all staff including more specific and specialised training in line with personal development plans for each individual staff member and the needs of the project as a whole.

Safeguarding Children and Adults

Everyone employed by Evolution Children Services has a duty to report incidents and allegations of abuse whether internal or external, which involves the young people we support.

All staff must ensure that they are clear of their responsibilities in child protection situations by reading and understanding the procedures and taking the necessary action.

A carer, parent, another adult, another young person, a person known to the young person or a complete stranger may perpetrate abuse.

Young people will be listened to and any allegation will be taken seriously. Young people will receive full support and protection.

In the event of any subsequent investigation the young person will be kept fully informed throughout the process. Next Step employees will act immediately once they are aware that a young person is suffering or has suffered abuse by informing the Manager who will follow procedure.

Staff who are the subject of an allegation of abuse will be suspended immediately, pending an internal investigation. All allegations will be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

All staff will receive training in both Adult and Children Safeguarding.

Keyworking

A key working system will be incorporated into systems of working as good practice. All individual work carried out will be focussed upon meeting all aspects of each young person's support plan. This will be achieved in an imaginative, holistic and inclusive manner, where each young person receiving a service are active participants within the planning, provision and evaluation of their plan. The allocated key worker will ensure consistent support and development for each young person. Regular one to one sessions will be available to each young person; these sessions will enable the young person to have an active input into the development of his or her individual support plan, and decision making processes and general systems within the project.

Support Plans

All young people will have a regularly reviewed and an up to date support plan reflecting their own individual needs, wishes and aspirations. Young people who are receiving a service from

leaving care will present with a pathway plan developed through the authorities' pathway planning process. This will form the foundation of the work undertaken with the young person.

The support plan will outline areas of assessed need and clearly and unambiguously outline methods needed to achieve these important issues. The recording of these plans will be in formats easily understandable for the young person and they should have regular opportunities to discuss the progress and focus of the ongoing plan. The manager will oversee the management of all support plans and will monitor their progress with key workers through the supervision process and the monthly monitoring systems.

Religion and Culture

Next Step will support, encourage and respect the religious and cultural beliefs and practices of any young person living at the project. All efforts will be made to ensure religious observance such as prayer or attending significant religious buildings are accommodated. Any issues that infringe the rights or fail to respect other young people at the project, relating to religion or culture will not be tolerated, and will be addressed promptly with discretion.

Contact and Promoting Positive Relationships

At Next Step we believe contact with natural families, carers, siblings and other significant people in a young person's life should be encouraged. The maintenance and further development of existing relationships is seen as fundamental to positive outcomes for young people, allowing for stability and a sense of belonging. We recognise that some of our young people will need support to build upon these relationships and key workers will work in a proactive manner to support at all stages of the process. The development of these relationships will ensure that young people have a network of support when they move on to their own tenancy.

Promotion of Health and Wellbeing

Whilst living at the project all young people will have access and be registered with a named general practitioner, dentist, and given support to access other primary and secondary health services as required.

Whilst respecting privacy and confidentiality for all young people, we also offer support and guidance in accessing a wide variety of support agencies including sexual health advice, support with drug and alcohol issues and access to services offering more specialised emotional and mental health issues.

Next Step has an experienced, qualified and knowledgeable worker who oversees all aspects of health and wellbeing and, in regards to health promotion, will endeavour to work alongside each young person, in an attempt to develop, stimulate and promote an interest in staying healthy, in both a physical and emotional sense. This worker will also facilitate group work sessions with young people to develop their knowledge base in regard to health related matters including: smoking cessation, sexual health, substance misuse, healthy eating and exercise to name but a few.

Fire and Emergency Procedures

It is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that day-to-day safety of all persons residing at, employed in or in any other way using the premises.

Smoke alarms and an internal fire alarm system have been installed in accordance with advice from the Fire Officer.

Young people will have an emergency escape plan and given instruction to ensure they are familiar with procedures should a fire breakout. They will be required to undertake regular evacuation procedures as part of their written agreement.

Quality Assurance

The aim of any service provider is to ensure that the highest possible standards of support are available to all the young people and families accessing their services. Evolution Children Services as an organisation and Next Step as a residential project acknowledge that to achieve this aim, then a clear and well structured process of quality assurance needs to be in place to ensure that all practices are monitored and evaluated to enable this paramount goal to be achieved. Due to our experience of operating Registered Children's Homes we will use our stringent monitoring and assessment tools to ensure a high standard of support and compliance within the project.

A range of methods will be implemented at Next Step to ensure that all efforts are made to ensure positive outcomes for all young people accessing our service. A survey questionnaire will be regularly issued to residents to gain their feedback on the service they receive to assist us in ensuring their stay at the project is as positive and beneficial to them as possible whilst at the same time identify areas of service improvement.

Residents' Meetings

This forum will offer young people the opportunity to have an input in relation to everyday issues pertaining to their lives. They will have direct responsibility for the creation of agendas and be able to influence the decision making process within the project. These meetings will take place fortnightly and minutes will be recorded and distributed with clear instruction as to who has responsibility to ensure that decisions are acted upon.

Keyworker Meetings

These formal and informal sessions will be a source of information exchange. The young person and their key worker will be able to discuss the ongoing progress of any individual support plans and look to develop other areas of work felt necessary or indeed requested. These sessions may be of use to those young people who find the residents group meetings identified above, rather intimidating and can address concerns and suggest improvements in a less formal arena.

End of Placement Questionnaires

It is important to get an understanding of the overall experience that a young person has had from their time in the project. With this in mind, a reader friendly questionnaire has been developed for use. This document will hopefully help the team to identify from a young person's perspective, 'what was good' and 'what was not so good' about their time at Next Step.

Access to Independent Advocates

All young people will have access to an independent advocate from NYAS. A representative from this service will visit the project regularly and again offer the young people a forum to make suggestions, voice concerns and generally air their views in relation to the project and its day to day running. Any issues can then be addressed by the advocate who can flag up topics raised with the staff and/ or management.

Supervision

Evolution Children Services as an organisation recognises the need for a structured and focussed process of supervision for all staff. All permanent workers will be expected to receive regular supervision. This will allow them to focus upon their own personal practice, the practices within the project as a whole as well as identifying training and support needs on an individual and collective basis. The process will be used by management to assess work performance and the effectiveness of the project in meeting the needs of the young people living there. Learning objectives and effective practice objectives will be set and fed into a wider personal development process.

Staff meetings

This forum will take place on a monthly basis. This will give the whole team an opportunity to discuss and reflect on all aspects of their work within the project. Update and feedback from key workers in relation to the young people they currently hold responsibility for, will enable the team as a whole to be comprehensively informed in relation to ongoing work, and any developments in relation to all young people. This process will support the links and information systems already in place within the project i.e. recording systems, handovers etc.

Personal Development and Appraisal

The need for a well trained, well motivated staff team is extremely important in the relation to positive outcomes for all young people. The development of a clear, and focussed process which aims to promote staff development and ensure that the aims and objectives of the project and organisation as a whole are achieved, is imperative. Through the process of supervision it is possible to begin to develop a personal development strategy for each individual. This process will be ongoing and allow the team to continuously develop a range of skills and abilities that enhances their practice and help them to work with and support young people more effectively, whilst also helping themselves to develop a career path that will allow them to experience a range of roles and situations that lead to progression should they wish to do so. This overall process will then allow for a situation where an appraisal system becomes part of the annual evaluation of the individual and the service as a whole. Jointly agreed aims and objectives become useful tools and make the service more responsive to the support needs of young people, through continuous development of staff and service.