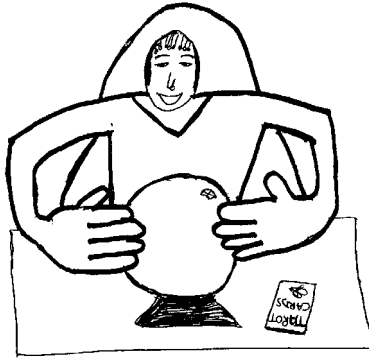


Chapter 4 - The Future

Easier to Read Summary



The future for Connexions is anything but certain...

In this last chapter we think about what might happen in the future to the Connexions Service.



The Government has said there will be big changes in the way money is given to Connexions to support young people.



They have said they want to see all the services that support young people work closer together.

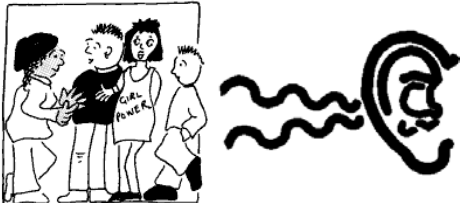
We have looked at all the things we have found through the work of the project. We think there are some important messages for the Government.



We think it will be important for Connexions to be independent from local services, and to continue to be able to work with young disabled people until they are 25.



We think the work that a Personal Adviser does is very important. Most important of all is the support they can give to young disabled people and their families in speaking up for what they need and want in their future.



We think Connexions and all other services need to listen to young people and involve them from the very start in developing new services.

‘As signalled in the Green Paper... we want the budgets for Connexions to be aligned with, and pooled within, children’s trusts’.
(DfES, 2004a).

The key principles of the Connexions Service have been referred to regularly throughout the report and most important in this chapter is the last one about the importance of evidence-based practice – ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation of ‘what works’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001). With this and the Government’s avowed intention about pooling budgets in mind, this chapter offers some important learning for children’s trusts and those supporting their introduction in central government.

This project provides a great deal of evidence that not only identifies specific issues relating to developing support for young disabled people, but points to clear directions for Connexions to take in the future if they are to continue to develop and improve the support they are able to offer. The following three points relate to the most important lessons from this project, which need to be central in the development of new ways of providing services to children and young people:

- Independence
- The role of the Personal Adviser
- Involving young disabled people and their families/carers.

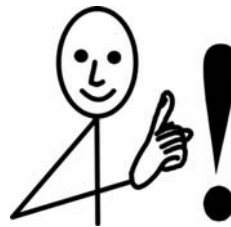


Independence

‘Connexions listened to me, not other people, they helped me do what I want to do, not what other people want me to do, I don’t have any criticisms to make.’ (Young woman, aged 18)

As this young woman suggested, key amongst all the findings of the project is the fact that young people and their families valued what Connexions offered in terms of support in speaking up and advocating on the young person’s behalf. Devolution of Connexions’ budgets to integrated children’s trusts will affect the ‘independence’ of the Connexions Personal Adviser if they become funded by, managed by and professionally accountable to a local authority.

It also means that Connexions will be identified with children’s services as opposed to the existing ‘cross-over’ role (13-25 years) covering both children’s services and adult services.



Important

Young disabled people want and benefit from access to independent advice and advocacy support.

If the responsibility for the delivery of the Connexions Service is to fall to local authorities and they are no longer able to offer *independent* support in ‘speaking up’ and advocating for a young person, a valued role will have been lost.

Re-organisation of services risks the loss of an independent service that has shown signs of becoming more adept and skilled at supporting young disabled people and their families in making themselves heard.



The Role of the Personal Adviser

Although inadequately resourced and supported to meet the expectations of the new services, the role held by a Personal Adviser has considerable potential as a ‘front line worker’, as an ‘early identifier of problems – both health and social’ and as a conduit through which young people and services can work together.

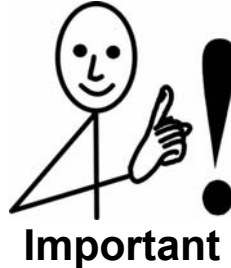
The Institute for Public Policy Research (Kendall and Harker, 2003) argued that there might be a need for the establishment of a new frontline worker role. The Personal Adviser role not only provides good evidence and learning about how this can be achieved, but actually provides a ‘ready trained’ workforce of ‘independent advice and guidance providers’.

However, there were clear training gaps and deficits in skills when it came to supporting young disabled people with more complex impairments and, more importantly, deficits in the resourcing to enable Personal Advisers to work in more individually appropriate ways. In the ongoing development of the role there needs to be a recognition that the same support (whether used or not) needs to be available to all young people, including those with more complex support needs or impairments.

The parents of one young man could not read and did not understand the letter sent to them by the college informing them about plans for the next year and confirming that their son had a place at the college. The mother told the project, ‘*Connexions helped sort out next year, I didn’t know what was happening*’, as the Personal Adviser, during a home visit, was able to read the letter to the parents.

This outcome was only possible because the worker involved had developed a long-term relationship with both the young person and his family. It demonstrates the need for small but personal actions, which the

Personal Adviser is ideally placed to carry out. Throughout the report there have been similar examples of small actions, whether inviting a young man with Asperger's syndrome to visit the main office during school holidays and thus encouraging him out of his home, or inviting students to the main office for their annual reviews.



The role of the Personal Adviser will be a key part in the delivery of joined up and integrated children's services.

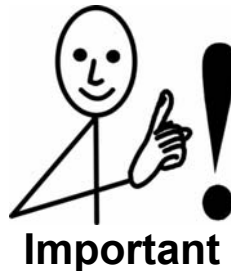
Their full potential for supporting young disabled people has not been supported or recognised in the contractual arrangements for Connexions Services.

Connexions Personal Advisers need additional training and support to be able to offer all parts of the Connexions Strategy to all young people and be able to support young people in individually appropriate ways through improved communication skills and understanding.



Involving Young Disabled People and Their Families/Carers

The project showed through both practice and record that it is possible to involve a wide and diverse population of people in consultation. To date young disabled people had been poorly represented in consultation groups linked to local Connexions Services, as had their parents or carers. The input from these young people and their parents will need to be central to the development of integrated children's services.



Young disabled people have a lot to say about the support they receive and how they wish or need to be supported. Ongoing consultation with young disabled people must be central to future developments.

Connexions Services and their partners in the development of re-modelled services need to meet with young disabled people on their terms, at times that are convenient to the young people and often individually. Without this flexibility, more skilled and adept communicators will drown out these minority groups' voices.

Conclusion

The work of this project over the last two years clearly demonstrates both the value of the Connexions Service in the lives of young disabled people and the impact of insufficient resource or investment in the Personal Adviser role. Connexions were set a number of targets in terms of support. Although many services were managing to achieve these targets, it could be at the cost of more individual and personal support that young disabled people need in the same way as their non-disabled peers do.

The future for Connexions lies in the hands of those charged with developing the Children Bill and implementing the Act when it is finally passed. These future developments should be based upon the large amount of evidence from this project, the National Audit Office report (National Audit Office, 2004) and more recently still, a DfES funded project carried out by MORI (DfES, 2004b) all of which identified the success that Connexions had had in building alliances with young people in their areas. Rather than Connexions funding being pooled into a single fund managed by the local children's service, the evidence suggests that money should be specifically allocated to Connexions in the locality and that this funding should be targeted to enable young disabled people to benefit from Connexions' support as many of their peers have already done.

The potential of the Connexions Service and the support it offers to young disabled people is yet to be fully realised. Under-resourcing this area of work risks the further 'disabling' of a population of young people, against a backdrop of the Government's commitment to education and learning as the way to improve lifelong opportunities.

There are many good signs, successes and interesting developments that should be protected and sustained during and following any re-organisation of budgets and services. The role of an independent advice and guidance provider, i.e. that of the Personal Adviser, will be central to developments in multi-agency working in children's services. If they can sustain a role crossing into the adult world, they can continue to build on the early successes described in this report. Managing information, acting as a trusted point of contact and supporting people in speaking up will all be central to the role. The Connexions Services had learned many valuable lessons regarding the involvement of young people generally and were

beginning to learn about involving young disabled people. This knowledge will be vital during the development of new integrated services and is not currently well developed in the social care, health or education fields. As an ally to young disabled people and their families and carers, the Personal Adviser has the potential to build a more person centred approach to support than that historically offered by these services.

With a growing bank of evidence from both youth offending teams and the CAMHS teams about the move from primary to secondary learning and its impact on some young people, there is considerable potential for an extended service offered by the Personal Adviser. The PA could have a valuable frontline role supporting early identification and intervention alongside building longer term alliances with young people, some of whom may find this move and future moves challenging and difficult.

In the words of one young participant in the project *‘if you want to do it, GO FOR IT!’* Connexions service providers need to support young disabled people in ‘going for it’ in the same way that they encourage all the other young people they support. This report shows that it can be done.

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
July 2004