

Preparing young people who are looked after for independence in adulthood: Libertas Children's Home

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Brief description

This example is about developing good relationships between young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and staff in a residential children's home. Libertas has high expectations of its residents and aspirations that they will attain well, achieve their potential and move successfully to independent living.

Overview – the provider's message

'Preparation for adulthood and independence doesn't start suddenly when a young person reaches 16 – it needs to be considered from a much earlier age. Young people need good support to make informed positive decisions and to enable them to take increasing responsibility for themselves.'

Angela Whitrick, Registered Manager

The good practice in detail

The purpose of the home is to encourage independence by preparing young people to finish their statutory education and then move into Further Education, training or employment.

Individually tailored care also supports and helps to prepare young people for moving on to semi-independent and fully independent living. Young people are encouraged and supported to aspire for the best for their future and to make good life choices and influence decisions about how they behave and what they do in their lives.

*'Now I feel
that I am
more than just
a statistic.'*

Libertas caters for a maximum of seven young people who generally stay for 18 months to two years in the run up to independence. The young people come from a variety of backgrounds including broken placements and adoption breakdowns. Many feel betrayed by their previous carers and display extreme and challenging behaviour.

A strong working ethos

A range of theoretical models is used to underpin the work, with different approaches being used in different situations and with different people. Staff are trained in attachment theory; task-focused work is used to enable young people to organise themselves for later life; and memory boxes and life-story work are undertaken to support young people in developing a sense of identity. All interventions have a solution-focused angle.

‘The manager involves us in decisions, big and small.’

To ensure that staff are able to support the overarching ethos, young people are involved in their recruitment. A residents' panel interviews each candidate and the members discuss their preferences with each other and with staff. Staff meetings are held every week and all staff have monthly supervision. A culture of learning has been developed so that staff are constantly looking for where improvements can be made. Angela says: ‘We are constantly changing and adapting, and incorporating our learning into future developments. We keep raising the bar so that we are achieving improved outcomes all the time.’

Effective support

Young people join the home after being referred by a placement panel. It is usually a well-planned process with emergency admissions being rare. Staff will visit the young person and seek their views. Young people are encouraged to take responsibility of the decision-making process in order to develop a sense of mutual respect and ownership.

Potential residents are then invited to visit the home and to feel as involved as possible in making the choice to live there. A welcome pack is provided with information about the home and other services that are available to them. A planning meeting ensures that staff know what the key focuses are with the young person and what goals they are working towards. Throughout, the young person is encouraged to make choices and see the consequences of their actions, both good and bad.

‘Since I have been at Libertas, it has helped me manage my behaviour and emotions. I feel happy and want to be a nice person.’

Expectations are clear and the young people are supported to develop strategies for coping with their own behaviour by engaging coping mechanisms and understanding triggers for their behaviour. A strong culture of achieving positive standards of behaviour ensures that new people who join the home are challenged by the existing residents to behave appropriately.

Each person has an ‘individual placement plan’ in relation to their behaviour and the staff spend time finding out what works with each individual, and planning strategies to address any issues. All differences are respected and valued and staff feel that they accompany the young people on their ‘journey’.

Moving to independence

Young people are encouraged to use the resources within the community as far as possible to encourage independence and to build up a social network. Activities are not routinely offered in the home and residents are supported to engage with community providers in the

same way that young people living with their families would. A strong focus is on holidays, which are planned with the young people, and which are used inspirationally. 'The young people see what they can achieve and aspire to, if they do well in their education and get a good job,' says Angela. 'Young people can feel a sense of isolation when they leave care and to try to reduce this we have a semi-independent flat which young people can apply to live in. It is attached to the home and support is available but the young people are encouraged to manage their own day to day care and finances.' A booklet entitled 'How ya going to live' details practical tasks they will need to undertake, such as budgeting and cooking.

To live in the semi-independent flat, the young people have to identify areas they feel they do well in and areas for development. Once in the flat, the young person has to live on a budget which is equivalent to what they would live on if in receipt of income support. If the young person works, they have to make a contribution to 'rent' which is saved for them and given to them when they leave. They are expected to cook and clean and get up by themselves, but they can get assistance from the home if it is needed.

“Libertas helped me in so many ways imaginable. Angela is very dedicated to her job, and goes out of her way for us.”

'The care system can sometimes work against young people developing independence,' says Angela, 'One young person who came here from another unit had never used the train or caught a bus and refused to go anywhere unless driven. Although he initially fought against it, he now travels alone very happily. Skills like this need to be learnt, and the residents have to cope with the realities of life when they leave. We try to get the young people centred in the realities of everyday life, but within a safe environment; we constantly undertake risk assessments and minimise any risks, but it is important that the young people learn to do these things and how to keep themselves safe.'

Provider background

Libertas is a residential children's home in Surrey catering for young people aged 14 to 18 years. It is owned and managed by the local authority and provides accommodation for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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