

Preparing for Adulthood Must Begin Before the Final Transition Review

A life-outcomes framework for employment, independence, health and belonging

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EXECUTIVE ABSTRACT

Transition planning too often becomes a late administrative exercise focused on placement. Young people need a developmental pathway towards employment, choice, relationships, health and community participation. This paper proposes an earlier, person-centred and outcome-accountable approach to preparing for adulthood.

A transition is not a destination

Securing a post-16 or post-19 placement is important, but it is not equivalent to preparing for adult life. A technically successful transfer can still leave a young person without communication access, employment experience, trusted relationships, health continuity or meaningful control over daily decisions.

Preparation should be organised around four connected outcomes: education and employment; independent living and decision-making; community inclusion and relationships; and health. These outcomes should shape learning from an early stage and become increasingly specific as the young person's aspirations and support needs develop.

Start with aspiration and communication

Young people are sometimes offered only options that fit existing services. Person-centred planning reverses the sequence: first understand interests, strengths, preferences and conditions for success; then assemble education, support and experience around them.

Communication access is foundational. A young person who uses AAC, signs, behaviour or supported decision-making needs consistent ways to express preference and dissent. Transition planning that cannot hear the person is not person-centred, regardless of the forms used.

Employment needs real exposure

Disabled people with autism and severe or specific learning difficulties experience some of the lowest employment rates, and autistic employees have faced a wide pay gap. Raising aspiration requires more than employability lessons. Young people need work encounters, supported internships, job carving, travel learning and employers prepared to adjust recruitment and supervision.

Schools and colleges should track the quality and continuity of experience: whether tasks are meaningful, skills transfer, support reduces appropriately and employers understand the learner. Local economic partnerships should treat supported employment as workforce development, not a charitable add-on.

Continuity across fragmented services

At adulthood, thresholds, teams, legal frameworks and professional relationships change. Families repeatedly retell histories while young people may lose trusted provision. Joint planning must therefore begin early enough for overlap between children's and adults' services.

Every plan should identify risks to continuity in health, communication equipment, social care, transport, education, benefits and safeguarding. Named ownership and escalation routes are essential. A referral sent is not a transition completed.

Measure adult life, not process completion

Systems frequently count reviews, referrals and placements. They should also examine sustained education or employment, stability of support, community participation, health access, choice and relationships. Outcomes must be interpreted with the young person, not imposed as a narrow model of independence.

The central question is whether preparation expands the person's control, contribution and belonging. Beginning early makes aspiration teachable, experience cumulative and support less vulnerable to a single high-stakes transition meeting.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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AUTHOR NOTE

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