



Impact of the Transition Support Service on young people's transitions: Perspectives of young people and significant others

Executive Summary

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Introduction

This evaluation was commissioned by includem to explore the effectiveness of their Transition Support Service (TSS) which provides support to help facilitate a successful transition for young people as they become independent of includem. TSS provides one-to-one relationship-based support which is expected to taper off as young people progress through the transition from includem. Young people have access to a 24-hour Helpline to get in touch with TSS if they need to and are supported in pursuing appropriate opportunities such as employability training, work experience and social activities. The aim of this evaluation was to understand young people and significant others' experience of includem TSS and the impact of support on young people's outcomes towards more positive community engagement, strengthened employability, building more positive relationships and reducing the risks of homelessness. In addition, the research sought to identify factors that facilitated and/or hindered young people's transitions. The evaluation took place between October 2017 and May 2019.

Methodology

The longitudinal research design included collecting data at three time points (TPs) as young people started TSS (TP1) and as they progressed towards and exited TSS (TP2 and TP3 respectively). The evaluation used a mixed methods approach which involved: interviews with young people, TSS staff and families/carers; analysis of data from includem's Management Analysis of Performance System (MAPS); and the use of self-esteem and resilience standardised measures. Case review evidence and interviews enabled young people's transitions to be traced from the beginning to the end of the research study over the three time points. The sample of 15 young people represented 33% of all young people involved with TSS in 2018 and was a mix of young women (9) and young men (6) between the ages of 14 and 20 years. Unique journey case studies were completed for five young people which reflected different transition pathways that young people from the sample group experienced as they exited includem.

Key Findings

- Young people identified the importance of positive, reciprocal and trusting relationships with the adults in their lives, including TSS staff, family members and staff in the organisations where they were on placement or volunteering. These kinds of

relationships were seen to be the main facilitators of successful transitions, whether in the context of progressing agreed outcomes or maintaining them.

- All young people in this study were actively involved in planning outcomes for themselves, with each young person having one primary outcome. The agreement of outcome/s in partnership with the young person seemed to be important to give young people a sense of ownership and locus of control. All, but two, of the young people achieved their primary outcomes. Those whose primary outcomes were not met were experiencing matters that were not in the control of TSS or the young people. On the other hand, some young people achieved over and beyond their primary outcomes. TSS staff were flexible and supported changing outcomes.
- At an average, young people were with TSS for over 14 months. Of the 13 young people who continued with TSS (two left the study due to personal circumstances), one exited after the shortest period of 5 months and one after the longest period of 40 months. Transitional support time periods reflect the needs of individuals and highlight the person-centredness of TSS; there is flexibility in supporting changing needs and outcomes, as well as providing a safe and secure space to meet young people's needs before they exit.
- The frequency and duration of support was tapered as expected, but in some cases, it continued to be high due to changing needs. Some young people were hesitant about leaving TSS and felt unprepared for the move. This included a sense of loss for leaving behind staff with whom they had good relationships as well as feeling under-confident. On occasion, there was a change of circumstances as they met their primary outcome, but other needs emerged which resulted in the support period being extended. This capacity for responsiveness is crucial as young people's journeys and pathways were not linear and required ongoing support.
- Young people reported that they preferred face-to-face contact. The frequency of contact and hours of support varied for different young people with some requiring a lot more support than others. As expected, for most young people the number of contacts at TP1 was high and tapered off by TP3. In some cases, the number of contact hours with Includem were quite high; this was mainly the case with two of the youngest participants due to their changing and ongoing needs.
- The 24-hour Helpline was also highlighted as being extremely helpful even though this meant, at times, engaging with a staff member who was not their contact person. The Helpline was used by young people at vulnerable moments as well as by their families.
- Data suggest that when the young people exited TSS, they were made aware that they could get in touch again if their circumstances changed. When a young person or family member contacted TSS, they were provided support. However, the data also suggest that not all young people retained contact and in one case, when contacted for participation in the research study, five months after exiting TSS, it was found that one young person was struggling. This highlights the value of pro-active check-ins/follow-up over extended periods of time.

- The support parents received was tapered and although they recognised that TSS was primarily for supporting the young person, parents reported that they felt limited parental contact with TSS reduced their engagement and the support they could offer their child. However, it is important to remember that only four parents participated in the study.
- Young people reported that statutory rules and restrictions acted as a barrier to them achieving their aspirations and preferred outcomes. These barriers were mostly at a systemic level, for example, accessing education, employment or benefits.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study found that TSS, according to the self-reports of young people, significant others and staff, as well as documentary evidence, was highly effective in addressing the four goals of community engagement, employability, building relationships and reducing the risks of homelessness. Positive outcomes were achieved by young people, despite the adversity of contexts of their lives and the complexity of their needs. TSS strategies were characterised by responsiveness at an individualised level as well as an understanding of the wider contexts which young people inhabited. TSS should continue to prioritise responsiveness as a means of recognising the unique transition journeys and strengths and needs of individual young people.

Young people reported the importance of positive, reciprocal and trusting relationships with the adults in their lives. TSS staff should maintain their positive relationships with young people as they provide them with a trusting and secure space. It is also important that TSS are able to support young people's relationships with families. However, TSS should be mindful that data suggest that families can have both a positive and negative impact on young people's lives and their transitions. Therefore, supporting positive family relationships needs to be individualised and responsive to changing family dynamics. Finally, TSS is to be commended for their commitment and skill in working with some of the most vulnerable young people in our society.

Recommendations for TSS

1. TSS should consider ways to link existing planning tools using a holistic approach throughout each young person's journey through includem, irrespective of the team they are working with. A more holistic approach to transition plans will help prepare young people for the move to TSS gradually whilst they are still using the core services, and with exit to positive destinations after exiting TSS and beyond.
2. It is commendable that TSS are able to support young people in line with their emerging support needs. Young people's changing life circumstances might make clear planning problematic, however TSS should continue to prepare young people for transition from TSS, as far as possible, several months prior to their exit being mindful of each young

person's uncertainties about exiting TSS balanced with their needs for future independence.

3. TSS should consider their follow up policy and practice so that there is a clear feedback loop for some time after the young person has exited TSS. The length and frequency of this follow up might have to be decided on a case to case basis.
4. It is important that TSS continue with their ongoing positive relationships with a range of organisations. Further it is crucial that there is a good fit between the young person's aspirations and support needs and the placement organisations as this could have an impact on young people's successful transitions.
5. Whilst TSS does work with parents, it is important that parents are prepared for their child's transition to TSS; this could include raising awareness of the difference between includem core service and TSS before young people start TSS, especially in terms of the reduction in frequency and length of engagement with parents.
6. It is important that others, including funders, recognise that when support is provided for a long time, such as 40 months, it is in the best interest of the young person and demonstrates TSS practice of being flexible, young person-centred and responsive to young people's changing aspirations and needs.
7. TSS should make funders aware of the importance of the funded activities for building trusting and secure relationships as well as these being crucial for dialogue and meeting the young person's aspirations and outcomes.

The full report and supplementary case study report are also available from includem.



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