

Reading LINK

Local Involvement Network

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Final Report on Review of Provision of Recreational Activities for those with a Disability in Reading

Completed February 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Group of Service Users and their carers in Reading approached the Reading LINK to express their concern that the only resource appropriate for their needs in Reading was the PHAB Club. The Reading LINK Board agreed to take this issue forward by reviewing the experiences of the service users and carers, taking the views of representatives of Reading Borough Council working with those with disabilities and all other local resources available that should be accessible for those with disabilities. The following are the key findings, recommendations and methods used when reviewing this issue:

KEY FINDINGS

1. With the introduction of personal budgets, it was felt that social services has put a particular focus on the needs of the user and family and less on the service provider (carer and organisations).

RECOMMENDATION

Social Services need to be sensitive to the fact that there may be difference in views between users of service and the family. Carers should be more involved in decisions made.

2. There is not always clarity and understanding by the user of the power of personal budgets.

RECOMMENDATION

Care Managers should ensure that advocacy support is always available in the event of a lack of understanding by the user of service. Service Users interviewed during work, on this issue had not had any access to an Advocacy Service.

3. Many practical issues need to be overcome if specialist services are reduced in favour of all being able to access mainstream services.

RECOMMENDATION

Reading Borough Council need to audit all their mainstream services to ensure that appropriate support, transport and equipment is available at all resources to assist the user and carer. However much support is available at mainstream services there are a significant number of service users who will never wish to access mainstream services. Reading Borough Council need to meet the needs of this group and let all concerned know how they plan to do this. Recently users and carers have become aware that funding for the PHAB Club is to be reduced which will certainly represent a reduction in service for this group.

4. Personal budgets require both the commitment of the user, carer and family to change the way they perceive support services. Intensive support is required to enable that transition and to encourage all to participate.

RECOMMENDATION

Comprehensive training on the changes must be available to users, carers and organisations to enable them to understand how this will impact on them. Consideration needs to be given to how social services will manage individual and organisational changes. The users and carers who made this referral currently have no understanding of the new personal care budgets. Carers do not know how they can access advice and support

5. The outcome of enabling mainstream services to be available to all will result in the reduction of many existing services.

RECOMMENDATION

Reading Borough Council must take into account views of the users, carers and service providers to assess how this will impact on current services and the problems created for those not wishing to access mainstream services.

METHODOLOGY

The method for arriving at these key findings and recommendations was achieved by the following:

The Reading LINK proposed approaching Reading Borough Council requesting the following information:

1. A list of daytime social activities for young adults with a physical disability
2. Transport available to social activities
3. Accessibility to such facilities (ie for service users in large motorized wheelchairs)
4. The extent to which community care assessments include information on these facilities and their availability.

Prior to their requesting this information, the LINK were put in contact with the Strategy Lead for the Physical Disability and Sensory Needs Partnership Board to discuss the concerns expressed by the referrers. It was explained to the LINK that the strategy of Reading Borough Council was that social activities should be accessed through mainstream services organised through the Everybody Active Programme. The representative from Reading Borough Council met with the referrers to discuss the work being undertaken by the Partnership Board to ensure inclusive communities. Contacts were also given to the referrers of various local forums where they would be able to express their opinion, make their concerns known and assist in contributing to future developments. The referrers highlighted examples of the barriers they experienced in accessing mainstream services which are:

1. Timely transport by Readibus
2. Availability of suitable hoists and slings for disabled users
3. Available and trained staff to provide assistance when using equipment such as trampoline
4. Liability insurance for activities outside the PA's core hours.

Discussions with the personal assistants for the service users demonstrated that there was a lack of understanding as to how care was funded and whether or not there was any flexibility within care budgets for planned activities that the service users may enjoy, but for which there did not appear to be a budget. There does not appear to be any training or understanding as to how budgets are managed to provide quality care. The carers spoken to were delivering daily direct care, but in some instances did not have access to sufficient funds to offer more interesting and varied resources to their clients.

VIEWS OF REFERRERS' ON READING LINK MANAGEMENT OF THEIR ISSUE

A subsequent meeting with the referrers was held to establish how useful they had found the LINK in enabling them to network with the appropriate agencies to promote their needs and express their concerns. The referrers appreciated the efforts the LINK had made on their behalf and in particular raising their profile and allowing them to be heard. They had not anticipated that this was an issue that would be easily resolved. They felt that despite their concerns Reading Borough Council **were not committed** to making a difference for them. Discussions on strategy did not take into account small minorities such as themselves .

CONCLUSION

Reading Borough Council need to respond in a proactive manner to the Reading LINK recommendations. In promoting personal care budgets they need to demonstrate that consideration is given to all requiring services and restore confidence in the minority groups who feel disenfranchised.

Appendix 1

Reading Borough Council response to Reading LINK Report on Review of Provision of Recreational Activities for those with a Disability in Reading – dated February 2010

Summary

In 2009 the LINK undertook a review of recreational activities for those with a disability in Reading, following an approach by a small group of young adults with disabilities and their personal assistants. As a result of this an audit of leisure facilities within Reading was instigated by the Council's Everybody Active team, producing an inventory of equipment and facilities available to aid access for people with disabilities. Positive outcomes from this work for the individuals concerned included better information and a review of services – increasing the choice available to them and offering them control in meeting their needs. Work which highlights service user and carer perspectives in this way offers valuable learning for Council, our partners and providers.

Response to Recommendations

1. With the introduction of personal budgets, it was felt that social services has put a particular focus on the needs of the user and family and less on the service provider (carer and organisations).

RECOMMENDATION

Social Services need to be sensitive to the fact that there may be difference in views between users of service and the family. Carers should be more involved in decisions made.

Within Social Services it is recognised as good practice to put the service user at the centre of all assessments and decision making. The introduction of personal budgets in Reading has supported this practice as the tools used to both assess and develop a support plan are very much designed to put the service user at the centre recognising their expertise in their condition.

Naturally we need to be confident that the service user is able to communicate their wishes and choices effectively and Care Managers support them to do this. The views and wishes of family and informal (unpaid) carers are very much taken into consideration as the assessment and support planning are often carried out in conjunction with them. Paid carers either employed through an agency or by the family themselves may be involved subject to the wishes of the service user.

Feedback from most Carers who were involved in the first phase of Self Directed Support (SDS) said that SDS had enabled them to be an equal partner in Support Planning and that SDS had supported them to continue in their caring role.

2. There is not always clarity and understanding by the user of the power of personal budgets.

RECOMMENDATION

Care Managers should ensure that advocacy support is always available in the event of a lack of understanding by the user of service. Service Users interviewed during the work on this issue, had not had any access to an Advocacy Service.

At this time Reading were working towards mainstreaming Personal Budgets in October 2010 in line with Government targets. The support required by service users around Personal Budgets is one area we are currently developing. Everyone that goes through our Self Directed Support process is able to access a brokerage service that supports them to find support options that meet their needs and goals.

The Council grant funds a number of advocacy services to support service users in decision making. This includes specialist advocacy services for people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities and for individuals assessed as lacking the capacity to make decisions for themselves. Leaflets about the services are available at public access points.

Princess Royal Carers' Trust provides information and support to carers via counselling, a telephone helpline, drop-in sessions and a dedicated email address for carers' enquiries.

3. Many practical issues need to be overcome if specialist services are reduced in favour of all being able to access mainstream services.

RECOMMENDATION

Reading Borough Council need to audit all their mainstream services to ensure that appropriate support, transport and equipment is available at all resources to assist the user and carer. However much support is available at mainstream services there are a significant number of service users who will never wish to access mainstream services. Reading Borough Council need to meet the needs of this group and let all concerned know how they plan to do this. Recently users and carers have become aware that funding for the PHAB Club is to be reduced which will certainly represent a reduction in service for this group.

Equipment & Facilities

Everybody Active is an innovative programme aimed at supporting people with disabilities to access mainstream services by offering specialist support and equipment. The programme offers sessions including Tai Chi, Swimming, Trampolining and Cycling across various venues in Reading. These sessions are held regularly at varying time but people are advised that they need to prebook to ensure appropriate support is available.

Everybody Active have undertaken an audit of leisure facilities within Reading to determine what equipment and facilities they have to aid access for people with disabilities.

Audit of Mainstream Services

Reading Borough Council has carried out Disability Audits in its key services.

These assessments identified what was necessary to meet the Disability Discrimination Act and to further improve disabled access to buildings and services as budgets and opportunities become available:

- The Council's capital strategy now specifically includes the Disability Discrimination Act and access within the criteria for deciding the priority for capital bids.

The Council maintains an ongoing dialogue on disability equality with local disabled people, through a range of fora including the:

- Physical Disability and Sensory Needs Network
- Everybody Active Sub-Group
- Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Carers' forums for Physical and Learning Disability and Mental health

Our service planning process is informed by this ongoing consultation and involvement. In turn, this is fed into relevant service and whole council action plans.

Transport

Readibus is generously funded (£389,746 in 2009/10) as part of the Council's transport plan. The Council understands that for some users the degree of difficulty faced, or the distance to the nearest bus stop, remain barriers to public transport use. For these travellers door-to-door transport facilities is an essential component of an equitable and available transport network. In Reading demand responsive (dial-a-ride) services are provided by Readibus, an independent charity that operates a fleet of fully accessible minibuses under Section 19 Permit legislation. Demand for this service continues to grow and to exceed the capacity of the operator.

Reading Borough Council also requires all hackney carriages to be wheelchair accessible, thereby considerably improving transport provision for mobility impaired people.

Access to specialist services

The Council will continue to seek views from service users and their carers about the types of services they wish to access. The implementation of personal budgets will mean that service users will be in control to make their

support choices so the Council will monitor where their purchases are being made and work with providers to develop services that aren't available.

Annually the Council undertake a comprehensive review of all Community Care Grants to ensure that agreements offer value for money and are delivering against service specifications, demonstrating an ability to innovate and meet the changing requirements of service users and commissioners. The PHAB Club continues to be funded by the Council in 2010-11 with some investment diverted to further develop specialist services that promote independence and well being. Funding of community services will continue to be reviewed against needs, preferences and strategic priorities.

4. Personal budgets require both the commitment of the user, carer and family to change the way they perceive support services. Intensive support is required to enable that transition and to encourage all to participate.

RECOMMENDATION

Comprehensive training on the changes must be available to users, carers and organisations to enable them to understand how this will impact on them. Consideration needs to be given to how social services will manage individual and organisational changes. The users and carers who made this referral currently have no understanding of the new personal care budgets. Carers do not know how they can access advice and support

The Council recognises that the introduction of Self Directed Support impacts on service users, carers and staff both internally and externally. As expressed in point 2 a limited number of service users and carers have experienced Self Directed Support so far but support is in place for everyone going through the process to ensure they understand the reasons for the new approach and are able to take advantage of the choices available to them.

The Council have been working hard to communicate with all groups likely to be affected by this change and this will continue. The Transformation Team leading this change regularly meet with service users and carers at forums/partnership boards to capture their views and support them to shape the new service. External providers have been invited to events and have received a newsletter explaining the changes, further updates will be sent periodically. Communications across all groups will continue throughout 2010-11 to support all stakeholders through the change.

Outside of these ongoing communications Care Managers are available to support service users and carers about any aspects of their support. Specifically for Carers, in June 2009 the Council and their partners including Crossroads and the Princes Royal Carers Trust launched a Carers Information Pack that is widely available.

5. The outcome of enabling mainstream services to be available to all will result in the reduction of many existing services.

RECOMMENDATION

Reading Borough Council must take into account views of the users, carers and service providers to assess how this will impact on current services and the problems created for those not wishing to access mainstream services.

The Council is striving to ensure mainstream services are available to all because that is what service users and carers have told us they want, whilst developing our strategies for people with learning disabilities, physical disability, long term conditions and sensory needs. Self Directed Support empowers service users who as consumers will directly influence and shape what is available. However, any changes in existing services will be subject to consultation with service users and carers and an equality impact assessment will be carried out on those services affected that are deemed as having highest relevance to equality as detailed in point 3.