

Issues relating to the individual transition of young special educational needs students moving from their education system onto an adult social care setting

Jaromír Maštalíř

Abstract: *In this article I would like to highlight the issues facing young adults leaving special education schools as the move from education services into adult social care services. Within this article I will raise my concerns regarding the complete lack of process during this transition period, leaving the involvement from the individual, their family and professionals in the planning for any future care needs; social needs; further education needs; dreams and aspirations for the individual, completely omitted.*

Key words: *student with special education needs, end of compulsory school attendance, transfer, transition planning, personalized transition plan*

1 Introduction

Pupil sending mainstream secondary schools usually go into further higher education (high schools, high vocational schools, then possibly University). However pupils attending special needs schools, more often than not, have no further educational experience and 'normal life' for those with disabilities and complex needs tends to be that of social services and usually directly into the care of a support service provider. At most they may have just one-year study on Practical schools.

Special school pupils could be generally defined as any young person who requires specialized support to improve health and to participate in daily activities – at home, at school and in the community due to their significant impairment in one or more of the following areas:

- health issues,
- cognitive difficulties,
- communication difficulties,

- limited sensory-motor skills,
- poor social integration skills,
- emotional/behavioural difficulties,
- poor self-help skills (The Transition Planning for Youth with Special Needs: A Community Support Guide, 2005, s. 3).

Pupils with special needs leaving their secondary education will receive a formal document and certificate. This certificate or report will contain a brief outline of that pupil's personality, character, and general behaviour during their time attending school. It will also contain additional information relating to their educational achievements and subjects completed. This document will also include any additional support needs the person may have in relation to study.

However there is a question regarding other information this document may or may not contain i. e. their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their future life; their abilities and support needs in relation to life skills; their interest in a career or further education. Is it indeed practice within the context of transition to think about such issues and if so is it recorded within this document. Furthermore if indeed it is recorded are these documents used by social services to plan for the individual's future. After all this is a very important milestone in everyone's life and what happens at this point could determine the level of success and happiness they may have in their adult life. They have, in law at least, reached adulthood.

"For disabled young people, however, this is not always the expectation. Disabled young people have historically had decisions made about their futures without being asked what it is they want to do, or with such limited choice available that they are simply expected to use existing support which offers limited options. The move towards personalisation could have a significant impact on the lives of disabled young people. Using the range of support which sits under the 'personalisation' term, should provide all disabled people with the opportunity to live lives as citizens with the same rights as others" (The National Children's Bureau, 2011, s. 1).

The change that transition brings, has an impact not only in the life of a student with a disability, but will significantly affect the people closest to them e. g. parents, siblings, other family members, classmates and friends. The transition from school to adult life is one of one of the most comprehensive changes that young people with complex needs will face in their lives.

"The problem of the 'transition' from school to adult life for people with learning disabilities is well known to families, professionals and policy-makers. Indeed, transition is a word that seems to now be always accompanied with a groan! For many working with disabled young people and their families transition is understood as the time disabled young people move from children's to adult services, rather than a natural stage of life that includes leaving school, starting work, going to college

or university, leaving home, trying out new experiences and making new friends” (Cowen, Duffy, Murray, 2010, p. 2).

2 Transfer versus transition

In this case we look at the term **transfer** as a life changing situation that every student will go through as they either, come to the end of their educational stage in life, or indeed as the move from childhood to adulthood. The concept of **transfer** can be understood in this context just as an event, in which the pupil with special education needs goes from one support system to another without any training, planning, or even consultation. It is a kind of formal “bureaucratic transmission” without any pre-planning in which young adults with a disability change or **transfer** from being a “student” to becoming a “client or user.” It is clear that within the student leaving certificate from school only educational information is detailed and indeed no life plan including care needs, developmental needs, and social needs are very obviously ignored.

Figuratively speaking the transfer is a stage that a student **must** take and as the school door closes behind them they have no idea what lies behind the open door that they now **must** take. The **transfer** has to happen, it is inevitable.

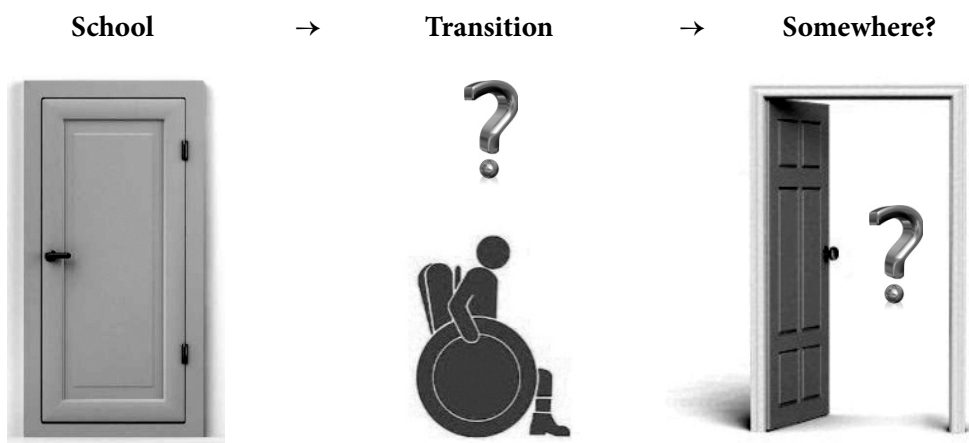


Figure 1: Author’s conception of transfer

Transition means an organized, premeditated and controlled process in which we work with the theme of the end of compulsory school attendance in order to ensure the conditions for the best, most natural and effective transition of young people with disabilities in real life, or other support services (Blum et al., 1993 in Transition:

getting it right for young people, 2006). It is “the movement from one set of circumstances to another resulting in changes to environments, relationships, behaviours, routines, roles and expectations. It is a process of change that for some may require substantial preparation, planning, adjustment and support” (Department of Education, 2013). McLeod (2002) considers the transition as a kind of bridge between the two periods. It is characterized by a change and a planned move from one bank to another. All people go through a series of changes in life. Some go smoothly and effortlessly over the bridge. However for some; this journey can be a difficult one and often need both assistance and guidance from others. “Transition – Effective integration and successful transition can be achieved when citizens and families are given clear entitlements and control of key resources” (Cowen, Duffy, Murray, 2010, s. 4).

For transition to be effective and a natural as well as planned process, in terms of students leaving special educational schools, it must surely involve all those people involved with that individual's life. This should include the individual, their family and friends, as well as those professionals who have been involved in the student's life including those who will be involved in the future.

British Department of Education (2013) defines transition planning as process that helps young people plan, prepare and work towards achieving their future directions and goals. It is planning now for a desired future. This focus recognizes that young people who engage in transition planning processes, and are supported to do so, make smoother transitions into adult life and greatly enhance their post-school outcomes and quality of life

It is a process that should:

- promote a smooth transition to adult life,
- empowering the individual,
- maximises choices to the individual,
- inform decision making,
- provide direction and purpose (Department of Education, 2013).

“Transition planning is a partnership involving the individual with special needs, their family, local service providers, school personnel and government staff who support youth transitioning to adulthood. Transition planning is an interactive, dynamic process that requires a number of meetings to prepare, plan and implement a successful transition for a youth with special needs. The purpose of transition planning for youth with special needs is to identify opportunities and experiences during their school years that will help them better prepare for life as an adult” (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2005, p. 5).

The output of this process should be the creation of a **“Personalized / individualized transition Plan”**.

3 Personalized Transition Plan

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2006) **Individual Transition Plan** describe as:

- document closely connected with a student's individual education program,
- pupil in this planning process is built into the very heart of the action,
- preparation should begin to be implemented two to three years before the end of compulsory schooling,
- can be seen as a specific profile (medallion) of the pupil, including a description of their current life situation, motivations, desires, abilities and skills,
- contains in detail a description of what will happen after leaving special school,
- targeted at the transition period between elementary school and special life in adulthood,
- foresees the creation of a supportive team, with the outcome to produce a personalised transition plan with the participation of – classroom teacher, assistant teacher, family members and other external professionals, etc.

“Crucial to the successful transition of all young people is forward planning based on the needs of the young person and their family, thus instilling confidence in both that their unique needs will be recognised and addressed. Ensuring that children and parents know about the opportunities and choices available and the range of support they may need to access is something which cannot start too early” (Department of Health, 2008, p. 6).

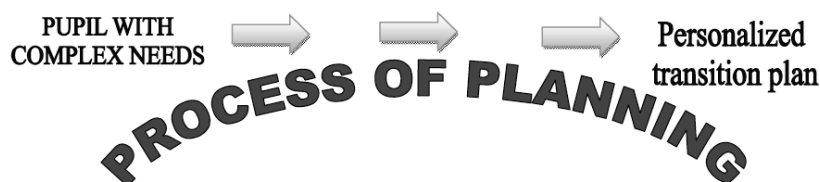


Figure 2: Transition planning

In Czech Republic there does not exist a scientific study that would directly describe this issue – only in a very narrow sense within “transit programs” in terms of the training and preparation of young people with disabilities in the planning and the transition from school to the labour market (see e. g. Bicková, 2011, Krejčířová, 2009, Opatřilová, D., Zámečníková, D., 2005, McLeod, 2002).

Foreign research in connection with this topic *transition planning for pupils with special education and complex needs from school into everyday life*, notes the following facts:

- transition from school to other support services is often not planned in advance,
- parents of children with disabilities are often not well informed about other related services,
- young people with disabilities (especially with complex needs) often do not understand why they have to leave school,
- poorly planned transition can have adverse effects on the health of young people with disabilities,
- lacks a comprehensive system of policies and measures for the transition of young people with complex needs from school to life,
- some young people are experiencing manifold transitions due to other life events, death of a parent, separation from family and then placed in institutional care, the transition from one type to another residential care (May, 2001).

The journal *Teaching Exceptional Children* in the context of planning the transition of pupils with special education and complex needs, provides some suggestions, recommendations, and guidance to special education teachers, and includes:

- connect parents in the process of transition planning,
- try to consolidate some of your approaches and strategies to support those that are commonly used to provide support for adults with disabilities,
- try to provide a general overview and overall orientation in the support system of people with disabilities,
- try to establish interdepartmental dialogue,
- soak up the knowledge and experience of other members of your team,
- support family paradigm in the context of the changing roles and responsibilities for their adolescent children with disabilities,
- try to create space and conditions for mutual communication and support between families with each other,
- communicate regularly with parents through their preferred methods of communication(diary, phone, email, personal contact),
- during transition planning, focus mainly on the positive features of the strengths of the pupil with special education and complex needs (Ankeny, Wilkins, 2009).

4 Brief excursions – transition planning in UK

In the English education system, the statutory requirement to attend school ceases in the June of the academic year in which the young person/pupil (including those who have been recognised as having special education needs) reaches the age of 16. As a result, young people have to make a transition from statutory schooling to one of a range of options which are, to varying degrees, available to them. In broad terms, these are usually seen as constituting three main pathways:

- *Education*: The young person can pursue an academically oriented education, probably in school sixth form, sixth form college, or further education college.
- *Training*: The young person can seek to develop more vocationally-oriented skills and knowledge, perhaps in a further education college or with a training provider.
- *Employment*: The young person can enter the labour market and find work (Dewson, Aston, Bates, Ritchie, 2004).

“Transition from young person to adulthood for pupils with special educational needs may be more difficult than for other young people since, in addition to the usual changes, the process concerns the change of a whole range of provision and related educational, health and social services. For pupils with a statement of special education needs (SEN), the process of transition formally starts after a young person’s 14th birthday. This stage in the process legally requires the Local Education Authorities (LEA) to work closely with the Social Services, Careers Service, Health Authority, Further Education Funding Council, the school and school-related services and of course, the young person and his/her parents. The Careers Service has a particularly significant role in that process. The Careers Service must be invited to the first annual review following a young person’s 14th birthday and to all subsequent reviews until the young person is 19 years old” (Polat, Kalambouka, Boyle, Nelson, 2001, s. 20).

Between 2008–2011 The Transition Support Programme also took place. This was run jointly by the Department for Education and the Department of Health. The programme was supported by the National Transition Support Team (NTST). NTST worked with a range of partner organisations to develop support that local areas could access, including training days relating to transition, as well as information booklets on specialist areas of work and extended case studies on good practice with the main aim to: **improve support for disabled young people in transition to adulthood through Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)**. ITP plans for the progression of students with disabilities aged 14 and over, from secondary school to adult life were intended to insure that students are prepared at graduation to participate in activities that interest them such as postsecondary education, vocational education, employment, and independent living. It is written with the help of the student, parent, teacher, social worker or service coordinator and adult service provider. It spells out what everyone needs to do in order to provide the training and services needed for a smooth ‘transition’ from school (Transition Information Network, 2011).

The Department of Education (2013) indicates which kind of crucial areas of pupil’s live every Individualized Transition Plan should contain:

Table 1: Crucial areas of pupil's live

Environments	Life roles	Life dimensions	Needed skills
such as work	worker	social	positive social
education and training	parent	physical	self-determination
leisure and recreation	friend	spiritual	transport and mobility
living arrangement	community participant	emotional	independent living
Community	flatmate	intellectual	leisure and recreational activities
	partner		education and training courses and programs

Ministry of Children and Family Development from British Columbia (2005), also recommends in the process of creating Individualized Transition plan that the following areas should be included:

- health such as medical needs and healthy lifestyle,
- daily living such self-care, shopping, meal preparation etc.,
- housing/living arrangements,
- finances and money management,
- friendship and socialization,
- transportation,
- post-secondary education and training,
- employment,
- recreation,
- community involvement such a spirituality and volunteerism,
- cultural associations,
- legal and advocacy needs.

5 Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to highlight a number of issues in relation to the transition period. Firstly to highlight the lack of preparation for and involvement in, the transition of young people with disabilities and/or complex needs leaving special education schools moving into adult social services. Secondly the lack of a consistent and detailed planning process within both the education system for those particular groups and within the adult social service system who will be receiving these individuals. It is very clear that there is little or no cross communication between education and adult social services. Lastly and by far the most crucial point, is that the general attitude of the importance of this transition process and indeed what should be included within the whole process; the communication between all people concerned, the planning

with the individual themselves; involvement of their family and other professionals, all seems to be sadly lacking and certainly not a priority. Surely it must be the case that those young people with additional support needs deserve the same opportunities in life as we all do, indeed it must be their **right** to have this.

In conclusion, I would like share a short story. The story, which would not take place without **transition planning** and support of all the participants of the planning team:

JOSH'S DREAM

Josh has long since dreamed of working with the police: "Fast cars. Walkie talkies. Stopping crime. Helping people. The Bill!"

Josh's mum and dad told school that Josh had talked about being a police officer since he was a little boy. Dad said: "I can't imagine him being a police officer, but I can see he could have a role in the police. Josh is very good at helping people."

Josh started working at the Hammerton Road Police Station every Friday, under the watchful eye of Kay the administrator who made sure that he experienced different aspects of police work.

His tasks included: washing police cars; sorting the mail; delivering messages; shadowing Police Officers in their various duties; watching officers deal with crime reports as they came in; visiting the horses in the mounted police section and spending time in a patrol car.

Josh's superb people skills and enthusiasm quickly led him to become a valued member of the team. He has been asked to stay on as a volunteer for one day a week during his last year at school. Staff at the station is keen for Josh to continue working with them when he leaves school.

"Josh is an asset to the police station. Everyone knows him and he is part of the team here. We would like to find a way for Josh to be here long term" (administrator, Hammerton road Police Station).

"It has been wonderful and beyond all our expectations. He is just exhausted when he leaves and often falls asleep in the car on the way home" (Josh's mum).

"It is just fantastic! When he is at school it is all he will talk about! It has really helped him to be more responsible!" (Teaching Assistant Supporting Josh)

(Cowen, Duffy, Murray, 2010, p. 27).

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6 Literature

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This paper is also a partial outcome of the *Specific research no. PdF_2012_040*, (under the title “*The issue of transition graduates of special primary schools with moderate learning disabilities and multiple disabilities concurrent impairment in social service system in relation to individual planning process*”).

Mgr. Jaromír Maštalíř
Ústav speciálně pedagogických studií
Pedagogická fakulta UP
Žižkovo náměstí 5
771 40 Olomouc
Czech Republic
e-mail: MastalirJ@seznam.cz
www.uss.upol.cz