

From Vulnerable Young people to Empowered Young Adults – The Benefits of Youth Workers in Healthcare

Nicola Rigby, Senior Youth Worker, MFT Youth Service



Introduction

Young people are dealing with a lot of transitions within life – education/puberty/self-identity/friendships/independence as well as all the external influences such as social media and peer pressure. A young person with a long-term health condition is also expected to take ownership and manage their condition alongside everything else. These young people are vulnerable due to them missing large amounts of the normal transitions in life due to hospital admissions, not well enough to attend education, medication affecting their bodies and unable to feel part of being a normal young person.

A lot of young people don't want the stigma associated with their condition and hide it from their peers. They don't always manage their condition well, leading to hospital admissions and not attending appointments.

Youth Worker Role

By securing funding we set up the MFT Youth service to support young people aged 11 to 25 years with long term health conditions. Being able to support young people from children's into adult health services. A youth worker's role is to support a young person with anything going on in their lives, focussing on the young person and not the condition. Being able to provide the time to listen, support and advocate for young people. A youth worker can support a young person through their life transitions and the external influences.

As the MFT Youth Service, all our support is led by the young people we work with. We are flexible in our approach and tailor what that looks like to individual young people.

We advocate for young people to ensure their voice is heard not only in their health care journey but also in other areas of their lives.



Figure 1: Youth Worker with young person

Outcomes

By Supporting young people in this way, the young person gains confidence, independence and life skills which in turns has a positive impact on their life decisions and being able to make positive choices around their long-term health condition. Which will reduce hospital admissions and DNA's. It also reduces the chance of longer term complications in the future which is positive on young people's future health and the NHS resources.



Figure 2: Peer Support activity

Case Study

A Young person aged 16 with severe asthma was under children's at his local hospital. He decided to move 250 miles to Manchester to live with his girlfriend and her family.

When he arrived in Manchester he came under Adult services at Wythenshawe and there had been no work done around transition. He started to miss appointments and the specialist nurse asked if the Youth Worker could offer support.

The youth worker built a good relationship with young person through text conversations and telephone calls. They built a good rapport and the young person started to open up to the Youth Worker. The young person spoke about there being domestic violence at his home before he moved to Manchester and spoke of how is relationship with his mum had broken down. With the young person's permission, the youth worker contacted mum. She was really upset and worried about her son, also about him managing his health condition, as he had not done this independently before. She felt reassured that her son had support. Both the young person and mum agreed for the youth worker to contact children services, to see what support was on offer.

The youth worker had concerns around the young person's living situation and his severe health condition. His girlfriend's family where not aware of the severity of his health condition.

The young person stopped attending appointments due to anxiety and catching the bus to appointments. It was the first time he had to be independent around his condition.

The youth worker spent time with the young person and worked on several techniques to build his confidence. The young person started to attend all appointments and taking responsibility for his medication, which in turn improved his health. The young person enrolled at college to start a course and the youth worker facilitated a conversation with girlfriend's family, so they had a better understanding and support appropriately. The young person started working to earn some money to help with his independence. The young person contacted mum and they are now working on their relationship.

References

- Marshall, M & Waring, G (2021), "They Make Heavy Stuff Lighter." Youth Workers in the Hospital Setting: A Service Evaluation, Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing, July 2021
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2016), Transition from Children's to Adult's Services for Young People Using Health or Social Care Services, NICE Guideline 43, NICE, London