



**INFORMING
FUTURES**

1625 Independent People

A YOUNG PERSON'S JOURNEY TO INDEPENDENCE — CASE STUDY

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This resource is part of the Informing Futures toolkit. It was co-created with young people, and reflects what they felt practitioners most needed to understand in order to work successfully with care and custody experienced young people.

For more information or queries on any of the topics covered in this toolkit, or to find out about training and consultancy we can offer please contact enquiries@1625ip.co.uk.

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A YOUNG PERSON'S JOURNEY TO INDEPENDENCE – CASE STUDY

Regularly going to college

This young person has initially been on quite a steep trajectory of independence. They've been living with their foster carers in a placement, which they really enjoy. The foster carers have provided a stable base for the young person and encouraged them to begin to do more things for themselves, sometimes outside of their comfort zone. The young person is relatively settled, they're feeling good and they are engaging well with college, regularly going in on the bus on their own.

Leaving foster placement

When the young person is 17 and a half, conversations begin about their impending move on from their foster placement. They feel pretty upset and worried about this, and although they have been showing amazing progress towards independence, they still feel like they need the support of reliable adults. Most of their friends at college aren't expected to be as independent as they will have to be when they move on and are given their own flat. This starts to feel frustrating, and the young person begins to 'need' their foster carers more, asking for and then demanding lifts to college (which the foster carers initially refuse as they are worried about the young person 'going backwards', but they don't really explain their reasons, and regularly give in to the young person's demands). Sometimes the young person doesn't make it into college. Their social worker is contacted and becomes worried, and starts to message the young person each morning to remind them to go in. The young person resents this because they perceive it as 'not being trusted'.

Understandably when it comes time to move into their new flat the young person requires some practical support to do so, as we all would, and their foster carers offer to help. However the young person becomes frustrated that they can't drive yet, and needing adults to help to move their things feels like another blow. The young person starts to feel less independent over-all.

For reflection - What could have helped the young person view their situation more positively?

Moving into a new flat

Once in the new flat things start to look up a bit. The young person loves being able to make an entire flat feel like theirs, and enjoys beginning to decorate with their belongings. They also enjoy chatting through with their new support worker what they need for the flat, and making lists. The support worker is impressed with their rapid progress. The young person goes off shopping on their own a few times to spend some of their leaving care grant on items for their kitchen, and buys a couple of recipe books. They feel the most independent

they have for a while, and they're back to getting the bus to college most days on their own. Their new support worker doesn't remind them to go, but does ask how it is going when they catch up.

Drops out of college

Whilst the young person was initially happy in their new flat, after a while they begin to feel a bit lonely there. At their foster placement they lived with their two foster carers, as well two other children and the family dog. They meet up with their foster carers every now and again, but the foster carers are thinking of moving house and this feels destabilising for the young person. Things also start to go less well at college. The young person has been making the most of being able to stay up late playing music whenever they want, something their foster carers wouldn't let them do. They begin sleeping through their alarms, and start to feel less motivated. The college try to tackle the young person's poor attendance, and their social worker also tries to talk to the young person about this, but the young person feels they are interfering. They initially don't see the point in going in every day, as they feel they can do their work fine at home, even if it means staying up late, but when they fail a module they become quite depressed and discouraged. Ultimately they choose to completely drop out of college, and refuse to engage in any conversations with either college or their workers about other options. At first they felt relief at having got rid of the pressure of college, but then they feel even more awful.

For reflection – from an adult perspective, we might see the young person as less independent as a result of dropping out of college, but was the young person exercising independence by making a decision on their own?

Calls mental health services

The young person's social worker has been trying to reach the young person, calling them and dropping by, but they don't answer the phone or the door. However, after a few weeks the young person makes a decision themselves to call up local mental health services, after talking with a friend and looking them up online. The mental health services agree with the young person's assessment that they need some additional support, and they schedule an initial assessment for a few weeks time.

First appointment – The young person still hasn't spoken much with their social worker, apart from a few chats when they realise their worker is really worried about them and answer the door. However, despite saying they felt ok to get the bus to the mental health appointment, the night before they ring their worker and ask for a lift. When they arrive they ask the worker to also come into the appointment. To the young person this feels like a dip in independence, as the young person didn't feel up to attending independently and felt less independent for 'needing services' and needing their worker to go into the appointment.

For reflection – How can emotions or mental health affect the way a young person (or a worker) feels about independence?

Regular appointments

Despite feeling nervous, and finding their first appointment hard, bit by bit the young person and the support worker work towards the young person attending appointments independently. They are now in a routine, get the bus every two weeks and are starting to feel much better. As they are doing 1to1 CBT they begin to identify how their feelings, thoughts and behaviours interact, and identify steps they can take to feel more in control of their feelings, thoughts and or behaviours. The mental health professional also helps them to recognise that their strengths, and how far they've come. They also work together to identify some interests the young person has, and come up with some ideas of things to do.

For reflection - How does feeling in control (or not!) affect how independent we feel?

Starts at a new college - this time the young person makes a choice and experiences positive consequences – they like the college and the course they have chosen, start to make new friends and feel positive and empowered to move towards new goals.

A note about independence and mental health

In this case study, mental wellbeing and sense of independence are interrelated. So when the young person was engaging well and independently with college their mental health was better, when it was poorer it resulted in them feeling less independent and then dropping out of college. The young person's mental health began to improve as they engaged with things to support this, but also because they were becoming more independent.

When working with young people it can be important to recognise this kind of interrelation, and to recognise that ability to 'behave independently' and make progress towards goals will fluctuate and that this is normal.