

“An inspirational tool for friendly unpicking” - a parent carer view of a PATH (December 2016).

This report is written from the viewpoint of a parent carer from the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF) on their experience of a PATH used as part of their child’s Annual Review. For further information from parent carers on the use of a PATH as a person centred planning tool please contact WSPCF email: office@wspcf.org.uk

“The PATH was used to guide the Annual Review meeting for my son’s Education Health and Care Plan. I had observed a PATH being used for team based service planning and could see how effective this approach could be for my son as we were approaching a time of significant change. As a 16 year old he was looking at his options for the next phase of his education, his SEN Statement was being changed to an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and the direct payment we received to support him in his development was being converted to a Personal Budget.

I first spoke to my son’s school about using the PATH - together we found out more on this process. With my son we agreed who we would invite to the meeting. I really liked being about to include my son’s grandparents and his Personal Assistant as it meant there was less pressure on me as a parent. We also invited my son’s Teaching Assistant as she works with him on a daily basis as well as the Teacher in Charge of the Special Support Centre which he attends, the School SENCo and the Choice Team Children and Family Worker.

The session itself was conducted by 2 facilitators - one led the conversation and the other captured the discussion on a huge sheet of paper. The facilitator roles are really important as they kept us focused and explained what would be happening which reassured the group. We spent the first part of the meeting finding out what my son liked / disliked, e.g. favourite football team, meal etc., which built rapport and helped him to come out of his shell. We also used some ‘props’ to remind us of ‘ground rules’ – although this felt a bit odd at times, it definitely broke the ice!”

A section of the PATH created during the meeting is shown below.



Why was this process different?

“In the past reviews have felt rather robotic and stiff, the PATH approach was different, it was a friendly way of unpicking issues. I learnt new things about my son, for example about the positive relationships he has developed. It was good to hear professionals talk about his social skills in such a constructive way. I felt a sense of ‘wow – he is doing really well, they really know his personality and character and are moving forward and getting somewhere.’

A normal Annual Review meeting can feel very tense, parents are often afraid that the child’s support may be taken away from them and you are going to have to justify your case and fight for it. This meeting felt very different, the conversation was transparent, the focus was on my son’s future and how we were going to work together to support him. Bringing my son’s grandparents also gave me emotional support which in turn helped me relax.

My son preferred the PATH meeting as the room was structured so he didn’t have to sit around a table and he liked having everyone in the room together.

I really think that a PATH is also a great tool for children and young people who are on ‘SEN Support’ as it offers a structure to identify outcomes and how they will get to where they need to be with the resources available. As my son has an Education Health Care Plan, we already have some of this documented in his paperwork, if a child or young person has not been through this statutory process some of this detail may well be missing – a PATH would be a great way to capture this for all to see. “

What would make the PATH even better?

“Although my son was present for the whole meeting he did become overwhelmed at times. Although we had told my son he could leave the meeting at anytime, after the meeting I found out he was concerned about doing so in case someone asked him where he was going on his way back to his normal lessons. Having an area in the room where he could move to for some head-space and building in a break would of helped and enabled us to ‘checked in’ with this him more easily.

Two hours is needed for the meeting so make sure the room is available for this whole time. This was the first time the school had organised a PATH and only 1.5hrs had been scheduled – this meant we were under a time pressure.

Using the ‘thumbs up, thumbs down’ technique as part of ‘One Year On’ would work well to ensure we didn’t fall back into ‘The Dream’ and had group consensus for what was possible and positive.

Making it clear at the beginning of the meeting who will support the child / young person in making sure that everyone has completed the actions agreed.“

What difference did the PATH make?

“My son’s PATH took place in February this year. Ten months on I can say that the majority of the targets for ‘One Year On’ have been achieved. My son is becoming an independent traveller – he has applied for his driving licence and is learning to drive. He has a railcard too and has been on the train to college and to see his friends. He has undertaken 6 months of voluntary work experience as a football coach and completed the National Citizenship Service Programme. His cooking skills are developing well; we found some brilliant recipe and food packages which enabled him to cook various family meals.

As for me, I found the PATH meeting inspirational, it was lovely to hear such positive comments, for example, how my son was a natural leader on the football pitch and how fond they all are of him. They genuinely care, are committed and enjoy spending time with him. Without a PATH it is unlikely that all of these outcomes would have been achieved or this type of discussion would have happened. The process let us bounce ideas off each other to help my son move closer to his dream. I’m looking forward to revisiting the PATH during my son’s next Annual Review meeting and agreeing lots of new outcomes that we can work on together. “