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Promoting self-advocacy and PfA for students with SEND to access annual health checks

Empowering learners to communicate confidently

School/Background Context

This specialist FE College was established in 2018 and provides day provision for learners with moderate to complex/profound learning difficulties. While established as an independent provider, the College works in collaboration a large multi academy trust.

Learner places have grown from 155 in 2018/19 to 227 in 2024/25. Learners are enrolled on Programmes of Study across three Pathways in addition to our Supported Internship programmes with the a University Hospital, Tesco and the Local Authority. The College's 3 Pathways are in place to meet the diverse needs of young people with a range of disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Our Vocational Pathway is preparing young people for employment, community engagement and independence; Independent Living Pathway preparing young people for as independent an adult life as possible; and, Supported Living Pathway preparing our young people with the most complex needs for a meaningful and connected adult life.

The settings QIP Ob 4 - is to deliver the redeveloped PfA curriculum ensuring even coverage of outcomes through monitoring of planning, teaching and assessment, this case study will contribute to the outcome of this objective.

The Challenge

- The NHS Long Term Plan set an ambition that by 2023/24, at least 75% of people aged 14 or over with a learning disability will have had an annual health check <https://www.england.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities/improving-health/annual-health-checks/>
- Baseline quantitative data from the Vocational (PfA) Student Survey questioning how confident they would be to make and attend a GP appointment indicates that 22% were very confident, 59% would need some help, and 19% would need a lot of help.
- Qualitative data from Staffordshire Healthwatch session indicates that students feel talked about and not to when visiting health professionals and that language used by healthcare professionals is too complex
- To raise teaching staff confidence in utilising the services of health care professionals in the provision to mock-up Annual Health checks
- To raise the knowledge of healthcare professionals in strategies to communicate with people with a learning difficulty so that they can talk to and not about them during appointments (supported by Dignity in Health Care for people with a Learning Disability, RCN, 2013; Mandatory Oliver McGowan Training for NHS staff and the report findings from the Richard Handley Inquest, PHE, 2013).

What They Did

Project Focus:

- To engage the college nursing team to attend sessions introducing learners to the process of an Annual Health Check and to support the making of an appointment and attending a mock Annual Health Check on the college site. To improve the confidence of learners to attend an appointment for an AHC. To improve communication between YPs with LDD and health care professionals during an AHC
- Improve staff knowledge of AHCs through emailed resources provided by primary care sources to include in P4A sessions for VOC learners. To develop a 3-lesson plan for the introduction to, making an appointment for and attendance of a mock AHC appointment to be delivered by teaching staff and college nursing team (1 session). In this pilot, these sessions were run by me with the intention to include in the PfA curriculum for all staff once impact had been assessed
- The sessions would support the development of independence and confidence of learners to make and attend GP appointments and confidence of health care professionals to communicate directly with the YP

Monitoring and feedback:

- Monitored through communication with the nursing team re. responses to emails and attendance at mock appointments. Feedback gathered from learners (re. confidence) post-appointment and from nurses (re. communication) post-appointment.
- A major hindrance to the gathering of qualitative data from the college healthcare professionals was the inconsistencies in the staffing of this service.

Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

Review and Act:

- Following the completion of the sessions and attendance at the mock AHC 32% feel very confident, 49% would need some help, 19% would need a lot of help to make and attend a G.P appointment This is an improvement of 10% of the very confident
- Feedback from the learner group comments suggested that they felt listened to and confident to answer questions because they could understand the language used by the health care practitioners and they were being directly spoken to. The 10% improvement was very much impacted by direct communication and simplified language. In order to increase this number, a greater focus on improving communication tools for health care professionals is necessary. Where improvement was not evident (in the % who continue to need a lot of help) it became clear through feedback discussion that factors outside the control of the curriculum were evident e.g. severity of the LD requiring continued support to access health care services e.g. communication difficulties, physical disabilities e.g. H.I or V.I or severely impaired mobility
- Greater liaison with parents to inform of the availability of AHCs
- Continued liaison with nursing team to improve confidence to communicate with YPs with LDD using the principles of the Oliver McGowan Training, the Dignity in Healthcare for people with a Learning Disability and the lessons learned from the Richard Handley inquest (Making reasonable adjustments for people with learning disabilities in the management of constipation. PHE, 2016). Training in using a range of open and closed questions and the development of Picture Communication Widget symbols to support communication where appropriate.

Outcomes and Anticipated Impact (continued)

Maintain the effort:

- To roll out the scheme of work to all VOC P4A tutors in the summer term
- To continue to promote the AHCs to learners, parents/carers through the college "Futures Events" (annual event in the summer term promoting next steps health and social care provision for learners when leaving education)
- To offer outreach to local GP surgeries for the development of communication strategies and resources for learners with LDD for use during AHCs
- Support learners and their parents/carers to complete NHS Hospital and Medication Passports as part of the PfA curriculum.