Easing the way into adulthood

The CREDO Project aims to develop good practice and planning with young people perceived as having profound and complex impairments as they look forward to adult life. It stands for Creating Real and Equal Development Opportunities. Jonathan Dobson and Nadine Jay report.

How can society and the communities it is made up of include the plans and dreams of young people with profound and complex impairments, a group of people who too frequently live in exclusion from the community that they want to live in?

These are questions and issues that the CREDO Project will be working with, challenging and, in turn, making a practical impact on the lives of young disabled people.

The CREDO Project is a result of a successful bid to the National Lottery Charities Board by Circles network in consultation with parents and professionals from the statutory and voluntary sector, including SENSE, Seeability, Learning Partnership West, schools and further education colleges. The award will be used to develop Person Centred Planning with young people (aged 13-19 years) with profound and complex impairments in England and Northern Ireland. It will focus on the issues that face individuals and people around them as they approach adult life.

A certain civil rights campaigner got up and said.

“I have a dream”. He did not say, “I have ‘quarterly reviews and assessments’”.

The analogy is used to make us think about how young disabled people must be given opportunities to dream and be allowed to control change in their own lives and indeed change in society generally. These issues and the CREDO Project are grounded in the social model of disability that identifies society as what needs to change rather than disabled people.

**Is planning something that disabled people have done to them or is it something that is done by the individual?** There are many experiences as there are individuals but the question is important.

The transition into adulthood is an exciting time when young people can dream of the future and set goals. For us all, goals and dreams can be both personal and public, involving friends, family, partners, lovers, travel, employment, and more. This is ordinary and everyday, whether you call it transition, youth, growing up or adolescence. However, the experience of a young disabled person preparing for adult life is often one of struggle with systems that seem only to lead to dependence and few choices. Families of the young person often consider the transition from school to adult life as a time of risk when the need to protect and care contradict the feelings of wanting their loved one to be independent and free to experiment. The fear is real. As a young person leaves known environments of school, familiar workers from children’s social and community services, there is the real risk of services disappearing altogether, throwing the young person and their family into a crisis.

The CREDO Project will be part of a process that allows the young person and their family time to prepare, plan and simply talk about concerns and be listened to. The challenges can and will be turned into opportunities – a chance to be creative in developing alternatives and choice.
The aim of the CREDO Project is to facilitate a planning process that the young person can control and tell others about, rather than be told what their plan / assessment / review is to be. **There are three main areas of work the project will deliver:**

**Planning with young people with profound and complex impairments**

Networks will be established to contact young disabled people, who will be introduced to methods of Person Centred Planning. This is a creative process that tells the young person’s life story, including their goals, fears, dreams, achievements and gifts, emphasising the whole life of the individual and, crucially, how their gifts and achievements point to their future as a citizen participating and contributing to community life. The plan will be used to develop a vision of the future for the young person’s adult life.

**Developing circles of support**

A circle of support is a support network around an individual, or focus person, using social and community links outside professional services. The circle will be committed to and walk with the focus person as they challenge the barriers to social inclusion.

If the young person wants, a circle of support can be facilitated. The purpose or direction of the circle will be always be controlled by the focus person who might want the circle to fulfil a practical formal role, for example to provide a Trust or support network facilitating the receipt of direct payments. Alternatively, the circle of support might be purely social, simply meeting to go out to the pub as a group of friends and providing the opportunities for informal support that are needed. Although different, each circle of support will be grounded in a commitment to a network of social links that come from the young person and links that develop from within a community. This network contrasts with those of special services – schools, colleges and day centres. Young people’s independence is already challenging these special institutions. The question to ask is, ‘can the individual control and effect change in their life and control the pace of that change’? Once this level of control is achieved and facilitated, how we think about independence and what an independent citizen is, will change. In this way the CREDO Project and those participating in it will begin to introduce the notion of interdependence and the implication of facilitation and support that independence requires.

**Sharing models of good practice**

The CREDO Project will act as a forum to share stories of success and challenges that young disabled people have to tell. This will be achieved in a number of ways:

- producing resource packs representing different experiences of development,

- a series of awareness raising events are planned over the year addressing issues of inclusion, interdependence, self determination and the particular issues for young people with profound and complex impairments going through transition.

- a conference is planned for late 2000, early 2001 when a video will also be launched.

There is little evidence of interagency working and few experiences of co-ordinated approaches for young people with profound and complex impairments and their families. The project will work to simplify this experience and increase the opportunities of control for both the young person and the family.

A way of planning will be developed that identifies a young person’s needs, wants and dreams. Social, education, health and community services are challenged by people with profound and complex impairments. Assessments using existing models for planning do not easily meet the young person’s needs. The individual can, through her or his circle of support or through the CREDO Project worker,
explore news of thinking and doing things. Taking time to get to know a young person and to begin to plan for the future in an environment that is known and friendly and will empower the individual to challenge existing prejudices and low expectations of disabled people. The struggle can otherwise be a lonely and frightening experience for the family.

As the CREDO Project develops with young people, their families and professionals, there will be many stories to tell. Everyone at Circles Network looks forward to establishing working partnerships with families and professionals across the country. All of us, as members of a community, have a responsibility to make a contribution to the individual and the collective lives of others. The question we need to ask each other is, ‘Where do you want to be’? And then we need to listen and respond.

Resource packs will begin to be available as the Circles Network CREDO Project grows. Please contact the project for information on participating in the CREDO Project, Person Centred Planning, setting up Circles of Support or training and workshops. If you are a young disabled person or you know someone who could benefit from the CREDO Project, please contact Nadine Jay

Circles Network run many projects across the UK and Northern Ireland supporting disabled people, parents, carers of all ages.

If you would like further information on the project or on Circles Network providing training and consultancy contact:

Nadine Jay - Project Manager East
nadine.jay@circlesnetwork.org.uk

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