**Moray College UHI**

**Learner Support**

**Transition Program -** *Kickstart Plus*

In session 14/15 as part of our area review, the Learner Support looked at ways we could improve the support and transition offered to students who were on the autistic spectrum. As a result of this review, at the beginning of session 15/16 we redesigned a transitional experience, into a more robust and formal transition program.

Further developments in session 17/18 are that the transitions program will be formally called Kickstart Plus and marketed towards those with autism and mental health issues. All schools in Moray and other external agencies are to be informed of the program to ensure the early identification and engagement of students.

During the current session, all support activity surrounding transitioning students have been recorded which will hopefully allow us to look at how effective the program has been.

**Background to the development of the program**

There are a number of common issues that students experience when coming to college for the first time, such as lack of confidence, coping with study and being in the college environment.

The Kickstart programme, which runs during the last 2 weeks of June, was devised to address these issues and to give students who are new to college a realistic insight into what studying at college will be like.

Students who disclosed autism or those who are suffering from extreme anxiety, were often directed to attend the Kickstart program as part of a planned transition into college. This was in addition to meeting with Learner Support and other significant staff prior to the summer break, before the start of their course in September.

However, we found that as September approached we would receive contact from a number of these students who’s anxiety had increased to such a level, through the summer, that some were unable to attend induction without a member of staff attending induction and enrolment with them. Some students continued to need this high level of support for many weeks, which we knew carried the risk of attachment and dependence. The presence of staff support had also, in some cases, prevented the student from making bonds / connections with peers at this crucial time.

What we realised was that no matter how complex a transition we put in place, we were missing the obvious point which was, especially in the case of someone with autism, having no contact throughout the summer break would negate the confidence and environmental familiarity the student had gained through the transition, as we had broken the routine of coming into college – the student would again be experiencing the anxieties of starting a new routine from scratch in September.

Up until the end of session 14/15, during induction week most of the Learner Support team were involved to varying degrees in buddying students. On a practical level, this put a strain on staff resources as the team were directed away from processing late disclosures and referrals that we see during enrolment.

By the beginning of session 16/17 we had no autistic students requiring staff buddies.

**What a typical transition looks like now**

To ensure that the student has the appropriate time to familiarise themselves and minimise anxiety, we encourage the transition as early as possible and over a period of time.

We do this by encouraging the student to start visiting college as soon as possible – usually from point of application. Often it is from an enquiry regarding the support that would be available were the student to apply.

Learner Support will more than likely have first met the student at school; if this is not the case, the first meeting is when the student comes into college on an arranged visit with a parent or support for learning from school.

Communication is crucial, especially with parents during the initial stages, as much of the students anxieties manifest at home and parents are able to feedback to us if there have been any issues that the student themselves have been unable to express to us. It should also be noted that the parents of young students who have autism, also need reassuring that the transition is going well.

The college will also liaise with and take guidance from external agencies regarding the appropriate and relevant level of support; with the permission of the student the college will also continue to communicate with parents, to ensure that the students holistic needs are being met.

**Stage 1.** The content and focus of the initial visit can be varied

If the student has not applied for a course we will introduce the student to student guidance, as part of the visit. Here they can discuss what they are interested in and potential courses; it can also be viewed as building up another familiar point of contact. We also introduce them to the Study Bar and staff allocated there as this is the area that they will go if they feel overwhelmed or stressed, at any time during their studies.

If and when the student has applied for a course we can then show them the course areas and the classrooms that they are likely to be working in. If possible we arrange for someone from the course area to introduce themselves to the student.

**Stage 2.** Kickstart

Students are encouraged to attend Kickstart which starts the process of interacting with small groups of students.

The Kickstart program is run by Learner Support and hosted in the Study Bar so this reinforces familiarity with both key staff and the environment.

*The Kickstart program was devised to give students who are new to college a realistic insight into what studying at college would be like. Students are aware that they will have to produce essays etc. but often it is not until they sit down to write an essay that they realise that they don’t know how to!*

*The program consists of a series of interweaving workshops which are adapted to the students level of study and introduces other essential skills such as working as part of a team, being an active listener and being a confident learner.*

**Stage 3.** Study Bar in the Summer

To ensure the continuity of the transition, the Study Bar is now staffed 4 days per week throughout the summer break. This allows the student to continue to come into college on a needs led basis and ensures that the student remains familiar to the routine of being in college.

This can mean coming in for a single visit mid-way through the summer break, or the student can come in on a weekly basis and work on study skills and confidence building with the support of Study Bar staff.

A crucial part of the students support, is the allocation of a member of staff who acts as a mentor, study skills advisor and advocate. This will be a Learner Support Worker who has had involvement with the transition from the beginning and throughout. The study skills / mentor will continue to work with the student throughout their entire time at college.

**Case Study –** anonymised example of a transition

At school John was unable to cope in mainstream classes due to high levels of stress and anxiety so attended small supported groups on a reduced timetable.

John applied to do a Level 4 course in April 2016. Initial contact with Learner Support came from John’s mother who wanted to know what support would be available to John. John was at high risk of not being able to cope with being in the college environment or sustain being in the classroom.

* **3rd May** - the initial support meeting with John and his mother – looked at additional support needs, relevant contacts and transition planning. John and his mother were also shown around the college – refectory areas etc.
* **10th May** - John received notification that he had been successful in gaining a place on his course – a date was arranged for his first transition session which had been planned during the initial meeting
* **2nd June** – 1st transition session - this meeting focused on preparing John for his attendance at Kickstart
* **14th & 16th** **June** -John attended Kickstart
* **21st July** – 2nd transition session - checked his emails in the Study Bar, did a short tour around college and checked out some classrooms then spend time in the library.
* **22nd July** – 3rd transition session – further tour of the college, looked at IT classrooms, checked emails and discussed some concerns.

John went on holiday with his parents

* **4th August** – 4th transition session – checked emails, familiarisation tour of blackboard, went for a coffee
* **8th August** – 5th transition session – prepared for induction

John attended the course induction unsupported.

John has sought support from the Study Bar and Empathy Bar on a regular basis. John’s mother has kept in contact with Learner Support, passing on concerns etc. that John has been unable to express to staff at college. Though there has been some difficult times for John regarding his anxieties, he has managed to remain on course on a full time basis which is a huge achievement. John applied to do a level 5 course in September 2017.