

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN FURTHER EDUCATION SETTINGS

Occupational therapists (OTs) work with young people with special needs through purposeful activity to develop independence and access to the physical and learning curriculum.

Needs may include physical disability, learning disability, learning difficulties, or psychological and mental health needs.

Occupational therapists use a person centred, needs led approach which includes:-

- adapting the learning environment (e.g. to take account of visual perceptual difficulties)
- adapting the physical environment (furniture, support for handwriting, IT access)
- support for developing life skills (self-care, shopping, budgeting, using community facilities)
- developing pre-vocational skills, supporting work experience and employment

Interventions may include:-

- strategies to manage personal care skills
- assessment for equipment such as specialist seating or wheelchairs; environmental access
- methods and equipment to support learning e.g. recording skills
- development of social skills and maintenance of self-esteem

Occupational therapists help with planning work experience, assessing vocational skills and assessment for equipment and adaptations to facilitate access to work. They also provide a home/college link and can help with development of skills at home.

Together with the young person, occupational therapists can work jointly with teachers, Connexions and other members of health and social services, education and employment teams.

### Transition:-

A number of young people with additional needs will have received occupational therapy in their earlier years but currently, occupational therapy services are under-resourced and it is rare for the occupational therapist to be involved in transition planning although this is often an important element in the team approach. However, it is recognised that transition can be a

vulnerable time and critical for making the most of opportunities; different educational settings create new demands.

The need for more effective transition support has been flagged up in the SEN Strategy 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (DfES 2004), 'Valuing People – A new Strategy for Learning Disability' (Department of Health 2001) and the Children and Young People's National Service Framework (publication 2004).

It is hoped that more comprehensive services will become available in due course.

Occupational therapy services for young adults requiring home building adaptations are usually based in social services but closer links with health are developing.

Where it is thought a young person might benefit from occupational therapy support in the learning environment, it would be helpful to contact the occupational therapist based in health in the local Learning Disability Team, or the Children's (Paediatric) Occupational Therapy Service for information about the local situation. Even if a service is not immediately available it is helpful to identify needs which can be notified to service commissioners.

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6.4.04