

Case study: Orientation and Induction Programme for new arrivals

Introduction

The Orientation and Induction Programme is a four week English language and integration programme for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Oxfordshire. Children can participate in this programme as preparation for and whilst waiting for mainstream school places. It is now in its seventh year; it was previously run by the Children's Society; when they closed their Oxford programme the County Council contracted a new organisation; Key 2, a UASC accommodation provider.

The key problem this case study addresses

Newly arrived unaccompanied asylum seeking children face complex challenges to transition and integrate into mainstream school or college. Not only do they need to adjust to a new country and understand different cultural and educational norms without family support, but this is often in the context of having witnessed or experienced trauma. Very practically, this can mean it takes time to adjust sleep patterns and routines. At the very least, most young people will have experienced an education very different to the English system; however many will have had significant time out of school or may not have been to school at all. School and college entry is frequently delayed for these young people. At times, these delays are exacerbated by a lack of robust education profile data about the young person, which can also lead to young people being placed at an inappropriate level or in an inappropriate form of provision.

What they do

The Orientation Programme provides four weeks of education and integration activities for newly arrived young people in Oxfordshire. It is a rolling programme so new arrivals can begin immediately, and caters for all levels of education background, from those who are illiterate in their own language through to those who have completed national qualifications in their home country. The class size is usually small (a maximum of eight), and so the language teaching is focused on the needs of the individuals in the class, using especially developed and adapted ESOL materials that respond to the particular needs of this group of young people.

In addition to the English language provision, induction and information sessions are key to the programme. These sessions cover a practical introduction to the local area, as well as providing vital information on living in the UK safely. The police run a session on laws relevant to young people, and other sessions are run by a variety of providers on sexual health; substance misuse; equality and diversity; respectful behaviour; safety in the home and money

management. The programme aims to provide a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment which helps the young people hear and explore these messages - which may be very different to the worldviews that they have grown up with. Emotional wellbeing sessions are run weekly, covering issues commonly faced including sleep hygiene, expressing feelings and low self-esteem.

Young people are typically readier to progress onto school or college following attendance, both as a result of the emphasis on learning English and improved communication skills, but also because the teacher helps the young people understand the rules, routines and expectations they will face in school. The teacher also provides reports for social workers, schools and colleges, to contribute to decision making around the most appropriate education provision for each young person, and to enable the school or college to have a greater understanding of the educational and wider needs of the young person. Young people should transition to mainstream education immediately following completion of the Orientation Programme, however the teacher can follow up with the school or college if entry is delayed for any reason. In some situations she has enabled young people to remain on the Orientation Programme longer than four weeks if there are significant delays (mainly in relation to complicated age assessments).

The difference this makes/why this is an example of good practice

Young people value the Orientation Programme; not only is their feedback consistently positive but attendance is also very high - last year this was 91%; reasons for not attending were usually clashing appointments or occasionally illness. They appreciate the nurturing environment and patient approach; they can often positively identify the progress that they have made, showing pride in their achievements, and many are able to confidently explain key messages from the information sessions.

Teachers in local schools see the impact of the Orientation Programme; the young people have had a taste of school expectations, building positive peer relationships, and the language, which eases their transition. The insights and information that the teacher provides about each young person, particularly around vulnerabilities and learning difficulties, is valued, and crucial in enabling the school to develop appropriate induction plans. Social workers also recognise the difference that the programme makes; it provides a space for the young people to become better known by professionals; giving all concerned, including schools and colleges, a better understanding of needs and risks.

For more information:

<http://www.key2.org.uk/>