September saw the launch of an exciting new service designed to prepare young people for the process of transitioning into adulthood. This service is in collaboration with the Education Authority’s special schools, Youth Service and the Trust’s Transition and Community Access Teams. The venture was created by the Transition Planning team to meet a need for young people with disabilities aged 14 -17 years attending special schools and their support units. Learning independent living and life skills is central to the programme which seeks to empower and enrich the young people involved. During the sessions they learn about relationships, friendships, physical, emotional and sexual health education. Positive mental health and healthy lifestyles in addition to internet safety are also covered. Confidence and self-esteem levels are enhanced and there is a great sense of camaraderie and support within the groups. There are 3 groups running across the Southern Trust localities within Armagh, Craigavon, Banbridge and the Newry/Mourne area.

Within the Craigavon/Banbridge Locality we have been delighted to work in partnership with the two local Special Schools, Donaldson and Ceara and other local learning Support Units. We currently have 13 young people attending the programme in this area and they attend every Wednesday morning from 9:30 to 12:30 throughout the school year. The Project Leader, Lorraine Gill is an experienced Youth leader who has worked with many of the young people on the programme through their role within the youth service. The programme is based in Banbridge Youth centre which is an excellent facility and allows access to outdoor space for sports activities, kitchen for independent cooking skills and various group rooms with access to computers if required.

The aim of the programme is to ensure the young people continue to develop their confidence and independence whilst being aware of strategies to stay safe as they continue to transition into the adult world. The ultimate goal is to ensure they have great fun in the process! For further information contact Mark Irwin on 028 3796 4350.

Transition Planning Team
Supported Transition Entry Programme (STEP)

There are an estimated 1250 children and young people aged up to 35 years with a visual impairment in Northern Ireland. Aside from providing their famous guide dogs, Guide Dogs NI also has a dedicated Children and Young People’s Team. Six Children’s Habilitation Specialists work across Northern Ireland to help children and young people reach their developmental milestones, progress through education and learn important life skills.

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Supporting families with visually impaired children

Supporting families with visually impaired children

Supporting families with visually impaired children

Case Study

Three-year-old Ben from Banbridge was diagnosed with bilateral anophthalmia (absence of both eyes) when he was just five hours old.

Guide Dogs’ Children’s Team have been working with the family since he was two months old to help develop his early movement, listening and play skills. When the Family Focus project established a Time to Play group in Banbridge in 2017, Ben and his mum Ann were among the first to sign up.

Ann said: “Ben’s condition affects everything really but he is making good progress at walking and we are working on his communication skills. He can be an anxious little boy when he is introduced to new environments, especially where there are crowds. It’s good for Ben to be with other children to enable him to get used to general noise – he’s an only child and will have to cope with this when he goes to school.

Ben works better in smaller groups like the Time to Play sessions. “Ben loves the music and nursery rhymes at Time to Play and he also loves stories. The group has taught Ben social skills and it was at the group that he first started to eat a snack with other children for the first time, which was wonderful. My hope for Ben for the future is that he becomes more sociable and more confident.”

For more information on the support available for children with visual impairments, contact Guide Dogs NI on 028 9421 0193 or email beadfall@guidedogsni.org.uk.
Family Support Work Service

The Family Support Work Service is one of a range of services which focuses on supporting children and their families. This service is well established throughout the Newry and Mourne area; it is unique and can be flexible to meet the needs of children and their families.

Family Support Workers take time and effort to build trusting and caring relationships based on openness.

They work in partnership with individual parents to provide an accessible and adaptable service.

The service aims to assist and support parents take responsibility for meeting the daily needs of their children and encouraging parents to establish daily routines and structures in respect of their children’s school attendance and health appointments etc. as a means of providing stability for a child. It also supports children and young people in their own home or to integrate into community services.

Referrals for this service are completed by the child’s social worker, approved by the Family Support Co-ordinator.

For further information contact Pergel McArdle on 028 3084 5520.

Newry Connections Group Win Social Enterprise Award

The Good Space in Newry was recently awarded the Social Enterprise NI’s ‘One to Watch Awards’ at a glittering award ceremony in Belfast.

Young people from across the area make, package and sell high quality soy wax candles, which are being sold throughout various outlets in Northern Ireland.

The Connections Group from Ratho, Lisburn and Donard Schools are some of the young people who help to produce these lovely candles. They are absolutely delighted and proudly displaying some of their Christmas hampers which they are getting ready to sell at various craft fairs and events over the coming weeks.

Recently appointed Training for Life Coach with The Good Space area Henning said, ‘Our Connections group enjoy a varied and interesting programme of events. The pupils love hands-on activities and they recently had fun solving all the components for the hampers, wrapping their finished goods, making and counting supplies and packing and labelling.

‘As The Good Space are delighted to provide this programme as we feel it is so beneficial to young people who face many challenges in life. They have made new friends from other schools and through the programme are learning about independence and its skills.’

If you would like to purchase any of the range check out the Good Space on www.space-e.com or ring Tara on 028 3025 2283.

Oscars for Inclusion

The Oscars for Inclusion was held this year in the Epicentre Youth Club in Armagh. The Education Authority Armagh Youth Council organised the formal for young people with a disability throughout the Armagh area. They invited young people from the inclusion projects and created a great party atmosphere, with the room fully dressed for the occasion.

The young people enjoyed dinner, spot presentations, mocktails and a disco. The Community Access Team support young people to enable them to access the YES Project and all of the Inclusion projects throughout the Trust area safely. The goal is to create an environment where they can develop friendships, increase self-esteem and worth, prevent isolation and become valued members of their local community.

The Armagh and Dungannon Community Access Team have been working in partnership with the Epicentre Youth staff on the YES Project for the past five years, which is an inclusion programme for young people with a disability. This is a Thursday evening from 7:00 to 9:00pm and it is an engaging and enjoyable youth provision service for young people with medium/high learning disabilities and autism aged 11 - 25 years living in the Armagh area.

The Youth Leader is Niamh Mc Kernan and the Club has created a space that is warm, welcoming and safe for all young people accessing the Epicentre on this evening. Niamh ensures adequate staffing levels are present to allow for a structured programme of recreational activities that complements the Epicentre’s drop in provision and this includes volunteers who act as ‘Buddies’ for the young members who join this project.

Oaklands Short Break Unit Celebration

Staff and service users of Oaklands Short Break Unit have celebrated 25 years at an event at the Navan Point in Armagh. Opened in 1993 it offers residential breaks for children and young people with complex, emotional or physical needs whilst balancing what the service can realistically offer. Children with a disability up to the age of 14 years can be considered.

To find out more about this service contact Mark Irwin 028 37 564050 or mark.irwin@southerntrust.hscni.net.

Carrickore Parent’s Group—Recruiting

Beryl Lyttle has been a social worker on the Armagh/Dungannon team since 2001 and has recently become involved in the Trust’s ‘Co-production Service Improvement Forum’.

Co-production is part of the ongoing development of PPI (personal and public involvement) and has a focus on staff and families working together as equal partners to improve service delivery.

Beryl has attended some initial lively meetings and enjoys the challenge – “I feel that working in partnership with individuals and families is a long term process, sometimes we need to have the difficult conversations that will help make lasting change; this new process is a great opportunity to work together in a relational way to move forward with ideas and solutions as a joint effort...it’s a continual cycle of evaluating services and their delivery.”

Beryl and the team of social workers are keen to hear from families how services are meeting children’s needs, and any suggestions that could be brought into the Co-production Forum. Contact Beryl on 028 3764 5270, we look forward to hearing from you.

Carraigore Parent’s Group—Recruiting

The Carrickore Parent’s Group have been invited to recruit new members in their Parent’s Group & include “Friends of Carrickore”.

The Parent’s Group and Carrickore staff recruited discuss and share ideas to support the facility in a number of ways. If you or anyone you know would like more information about the Parent’s group & what it involves or indeed would have an interest in joining please contact Jim McConnell (Chairperson) for further information on 074 6400 5673.

Meet Our Co-Production Champion

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Short Breaks Team Specialist Childminding Service

The Short Breaks Team based in the Hill Building of St. Luke’s Hospital Armagh has responsibility for running the Specialist Childminding Service in partnership with children and the Early Years Team.

The childminders receive additional training and support to carry out this task and are individuals with a particular interest in providing short breaks for children with disabilities. The aim of the service is to provide a safe and quality assured short break that normalises caring arrangements and promotes parental choice.

To access the service children must be known to one of the children with disability social work teams who make a referral based on an assessment of need. Please are closely tailored on the basis of children’s needs, and the best way which the service can realistically offer. Children with a disability up to the age of 14 years can be considered.

To find out more about this service contact Mark Irwin 028 37 564050 or mark.irwin@southerntrust.hscni.net.