

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM TO LIVE THEIR LIVES

**Planning for the future:
Preventing a young person from being at risk**

Declan

Background before support

In early childhood, Declan had some speech delay and while at nursery was identified as having a mild learning disability. He was also diagnosed as having cerebral palsy, which doesn't affect him too much but does mean he walks with a slight limp (which could get worse). Declan's parents separated when he was 13 - He lives with Mum and sees Dad regularly.

When he was 15 there was an issue when he sent flirty messages via Facebook to two eleven-year-old girls. He is a very likeable young man but has a difficulty understanding personal boundaries towards others and around giving out his own personal information.

Declan is now 16 years old. He spends most of his free days either sleeping or online. Declan loves technology and electronic music and wants to work with it in the future. He is very active on social media but does not always see the inappropriateness of some of his actions. He wants a 'normal' life like everyone else but is unsure what this actually means. He gets very angry when he feels he is labelled as 'disabled' or having a 'learning disability' because he worries about how this makes him look to other people. He is desperate to 'fit in'. One thing he is definite about is that he wants his own place to live in the future. He also talks about wanting a girlfriend or boyfriend because he says he wants to "have sex."

Declan and his younger brother went to his local primary school, during which time he had a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and his family were told he was autistic. He enjoyed school though didn't seem to make much academic progress. He attended a Special School for his secondary education which was quite far from home, making it difficult to socialise with school friends out-of-hours.

Recently Declan decided school was doing nothing for him and said that he wanted to leave. He has been offered a 'Skills for Life' course at college but said that's "for kids." The school and the Local Authority funding Declan's placement have spoken with mother and agreed to continue providing a place until he is 19 years old but she is unsure if he will agree to this. Declan has a good relationship with one of the school's support staff who agreed to speak with him about why he wants to leave.

Currently Declan receives no other support from services and his mother is worried about his future, particularly as he rejects his disabilities and offers of support because he doesn't want to be perceived as 'disabled' or weak. He has already refused aids and adaptations to do with his cerebral palsy as he is worried they make him stand out more. He has also refused to attend physiotherapy sessions to improve his strength and flexibility.

Declan has no clear plans for his future and his mum is struggling to support him at home stating she cannot cope but cannot leave him homeless.

His father lives in a one bedroom flat and hasn't offered for him to move in with him. Dad struggles to know what to do to help. When he sees Declan they want to do things they enjoy like going to the football or watching a film or going out to eat but his parents are aware that this is not helping Mum to set boundaries and expectations.

The skills, competences and knowledge to make a positive change

School Support Worker

The support worker at the school meets with Declan in a quiet space to talk to him about why he wants to leave school. Declan tells her that he doesn't get anything from being there and it is a waste of time. He wants to get a job, have money and a girlfriend and that being at the school is cramping his style.

The school support worker asked if he was aware of any of the activities that take place at the school in the evenings. Declan said he didn't because he wouldn't be able to attend as he lived too far away, the same explanation given for why there was no point in making friends at the school, as he could never see them when he is at home.

The support worker showed him some of the activities that included martial arts and self-defence and a social group where the students went to the town to develop their social skills through going to the cinema and other leisure activities. There was also an electronic music production after-school club that would be great for Declan who loved music and his computer. Declan liked the sound of the fitness, especially the martial arts and self-defence but didn't think he could do it with his condition. The support worker agreed that she would check if he was interested.

Named Social Worker

Declan didn't have a named social worker as a child but now he is moving through transition he has been allocated a social worker to plan his transition into adulthood (working across both children and adult social care). There had been some confusion due to Declan's plans to drop out of school but the worker made contact with the school and Declan's mother about the current situation and the options available. The social worker asked to meet with Declan who was reluctant but the social worker advised that she might have some ideas about him accessing the school's activities if he was interested.

The social worker met with Declan and his mother, both separately and together, explaining that she had had autism training and recognised the importance of helping Declan plan for the future and to think about things he really likes to do or wants to do as the basis to plan from. She made sure she had enough time to explain everything without rushing. She talked about a person-centred support plan which would help Declan work towards his big goal as an adult. Declan said that he wants to be independent of his parents, have his own place and a relationship. The social worker also talked about a personal support plan, identifying goals and activities that were meaningful to Declan and enabling him to develop his skills and experiences to support him living an 'ordinary life'. Everyone, including Declan, will work together in a positive manner to support him in achieving his goals and to prevent things going wrong.

The social worker asked if Declan would like to attend some of the groups at school if he could, asking what subjects he might be interested in if he could attend, and he said he would like to do music production and was also interested in the martial arts or self-defence that the support worker from the school told him about.

The social worker said she would draft a plan, advising him she would want to speak to the school and the physiotherapist which Declan agreed to - he thought it would be a waste of time but if it meant he could do music and the fitness sessions after school, he would be happy.

In addition; the social worker offered the mother a Carer's Assessment to see if there was anything that she could access for some support within her caring role. Mother didn't see herself in this way and was a private person. The social worker assured her that the first step was providing her with the opportunity to talk about the impact on her own health and well-being and for some people that process is a relief. She also spoke to father who agreed to offer more practical support and help for Declan in making positive contacts within his local community such as attending the leisure centre to have fun rather than sitting inside and watching a film, even though the latter could also be a positive thing, particularly when talking about developing relationships. His father recognised that he had a part to play in educating Declan in his understanding of what is right and wrong in building relationships. It transpired that he was a computer programme planner and agreed to spend some time with Declan on the computer, teaching him how to stay safe whilst on social media, etc.

School and Education

The school and education department agreed that Declan could remain at the school until the age of 18 if he identified a course that he would commit to. In addition, this would enable him to participate in some of the social developmental activities as this was something that he could not access at home. Whilst the Local Authority was aware that young people living away from home in educational settings risk becoming detached from their home communities, the social worker believed that one night a week would allow Declan access to the social skills development group especially for young people with autism and those who struggle to make positive connections. The social worker thought that would have a positive influence in his appropriateness in attempting to develop relationships. He could also attend the fitness sessions that would be positive for his muscle strength and could improve his confidence and self-image.

The social worker also explained that this would also support mother by having an evening to herself.

It would also form a basis to develop a good transition plan into adult life, making links with the local college in planning for future job / employment.

Physiotherapist

The physiotherapist advised that he saw Declan regularly despite him refusing to acknowledge his cerebral palsy, although he knew he didn't want it to get worse. The social worker spoke to him about the potential to do a martial art or self-defence and wondered if this would be ok for Declan to do, as he had shown interest. The Physiotherapist thought this could be good to help with strengthening and coordination but the coach would need to know what he or she was doing. He also thought the self-defence would help him feel more connected with his body, refocusing his mind away from its limitations. He offered, with Declan's permission, to speak to the coach and contribute to a programme supporting his individual needs.

Outcome achieved for Declan

Declan has a focus that is meaningful to him and has the opportunity to develop skills and relationships. He will also participate in activities that will build his confidence and support his physical wellbeing.

Supporting outcomes

- Declan's risk of 'getting into trouble' has significantly reduced whilst he accesses skills development.
- His father will be more engaged through using his skills in IT and will still have good times whilst educating Declan.
- Declan feels happy, he is getting the opportunity to do things he wants and is spending a night away from home so he can be more independent.
- Mother is happy as she gets some time for herself and feels positive that there is a plan that will help to prepare Declan for adult life, that will include planning earlier to support the transition into college locally at 18
- Declan puts what he learns at school into practice at home, with his support plan encouraging him to develop his independent living skills in preparation for getting his own place.
- Declan meets someone at school of his own age and has a mutual relationship.