Staying Put and upholding the rights of young people leaving out of home care

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Overview

- A broad overview of the direction of travel in England

- Taking a rights based perspective

- Staying Put pilot and evaluation (2008-2011)

- Reflections on the methodology

- Headline messages from the research

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Care is never an end in itself, it's always just one stage of a child's journey into adulthood: the true outcome measure for care must be related to the quality of adult life the young person achieves (ADCS, 2013, p.1)

Good enough corporate parenting?

I didn't want to go. I still had to go anyway. I didn't have a choice...I was moving out at 18, end of discussion and the bit that really pissed me off is that they chucked me out on my eighteenth birthday (cited in Munro et al., 2011).

My real social worker rang me and said, on your 18ᵗʰ birthday, you're going to have to move, you're going to have to go in to a hostel [I: On your actual birthday?]. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was on my birthday or the day after, and then I had to go to [hostel], then er that's when it got really bad…I went downhill. I was with like druggies and crackheads and shit. They shouldn't have kicked me out like that (cited in Butterworth et al., 2016, p.6)

UK developments

- Targeted legislation and extension of duties
- Direction of travel (work in progress): from 'accelerated and compressed' to '**extended and graduated**' transitions
- Driver for reform: investing in children and citizen workers of the future/avoiding reliance on the state into adulthood

Catalysts for development

- Acknowledgement that leaving care is the Achilles Heel of the system (Sinclair)
- Enhanced understanding of the human and financial costs of failing to improve support and services
- Research and national administrative data on outcomes
- Media attention and hearing the voices of young people in out of home care

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Catalysts for development

- Charitable sector lobbying
- Cost modeling and invest to save principles
- Ofsted inspections: specific focus on leaving care services

Value in acknowledging that young people leaving care have a **right to support** rather than framing the discourse around 'additional needs' and 'deficits'
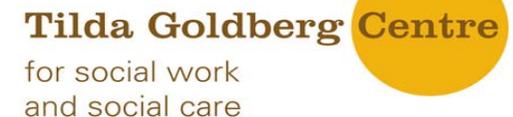
UNCRC: Key principles

- Non-discrimination (Article 2)

- Children's best interests as a primary consideration (Article 3)

- Right to survival and development (Article 6)

- Express views freely in all matters affecting the child (Article 12)

- Those separated from their birth families are entitled to special care and protection to promote their physical and psychological recovery (Article 20, 21)

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3Ps typology

- **Protection:** not be subject to abuse, neglect or exploitation

- **Provision:** of resources and services to support an adequate standard of life and development (including access to education and health care)

- **Participation:** to express views and for these to be given due weight

Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010, p.19)

Recognition of the importance of:

- **Preparation and planning:** 'equipped with social and life skills'

- **Process of transition:** taking into consideration gender, age, maturity and particular circumstances (including counselling and support)

- **Providing aftercare support:** ongoing educational and vocational opportunities and access to social, legal and health services and appropriate financial support

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Staying Put Pilot & Evaluation

Allowing young people with an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carer to stay put

Overview

Pilot in 11 local authorities (2008-2011)

Objectives:

- Enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their foster carers, so they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way
- Provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in EET
- Give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence

Methodology

Assess the effectiveness and impact of the staying put pilots in meeting the objectives above and promoting positive outcomes & establish the unit costs of staying put and roll out

- Mapping exercise in 11 authorities
- In-depth work in 6 local authorities including:
  - Face to face interviews with 21 young people who stayed put and 11 who did not (**peer research methodology**)
  - 31 interviews with young people's current and former foster carers
  - 14 interviews with young people's leaving care personal advisors
  - Focus groups and verification surveys (time spent activity data)
  - Analysis of MIS data to explore uptake of staying put and *early* outcomes

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Reflections on the methodology

- Pragmatism: parameters influenced by funder's timeframe for completion and budget
- Small sample sizes
- Rich insights from young people (peer research methodology)
- Analysis drawing on Sinclair et al (2007) and Schofield & Beek (2009)
- Many young people still in their Staying Put placements or had only recently made the transition (*early* outcomes and still 'in transition')

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Reflections on the methodology

Peer research methodology

- Potential to empower young people to participate in research by minimising power imbalances and reducing bias
- Risk of tokenism
- Balancing act: 'top down' demands of the academy and funders for scientifically robust evidence with ethical values of social work and commitment to hearing the voice of service users (Aldridge, 2014; Parton & Kirk, 2010)

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Peer research methodology in Staying Put

- Care experienced young people aged 18-25 recruited as peer researchers
- Involved in decisions about the research questions, design of the research tools, undertaking data collection, analysis of the findings, write up and dissemination
- Ethical issues: recruitment and selection of peer researchers & implications for participants too
- Analysis, data quality and presentation of the findings
- Additional insights by virtue of the peer researchers' involvement ('pathway planning syndrome') (Lushey and Munro, 2015)

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Findings: Models of Delivery

- Majority of local authorities adopted a 'pure familial model'
- Eligible to stay put if you were in foster care and had an 'established familial relationship' with your carers

Staying put is about remaining with the family or within the family...We have one foster carer is staying put and her own son is slightly older...Her son went off to college and he came back. He went off to live with mates. It failed...staying put has allowed [her foster son] a lot of these opportunities

Models of Delivery

- Hybrid model adopted by 3 local authorities (1 in-depth)

- Removed the pre-requisite of an 'established familial relationship'

There will be some young people who've been severely disadvantaged because they haven't enjoyed an established relationship....As they near the end of their childhood as it were, they're least prepared...to survive.

EET as a condition

- Pilot aim 'to provide stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in EET'

- Local authorities tended to impose it as a condition rather than an intended outcome

- Different perspectives:

If somebody's going to stay put, they've got to be basically employed or in education, training or in a position to move into it...if young people are not engaged, just staying in bed all day...you're spending a lot of money for nothing

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Alternative perspectives

If somebody's going to stay put, they've got to be basically employed or in education, training or in a position to move into it...if young people are not engaged, just staying in bed all day...you're spending a lot of money for nothing

OR

In fact those that aren't in education, employment or training are the ones who are more likely to need to stay longer

Pathways

- Direct pathways (straight form care to 'independent' living)
- Transitional placement pathways (one or more supported placements as a 'bridge' to 'independence'
- Complex pathways (multiple moves and changes)

- Right2BCared4 (16-18 years): transitional placement pathways most common
- Staying Put (up to 21): direct pathway to own tenancy most common
- Complex (9 young people who had 32 moves between them)

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Timing of transitions

- Importance of choice and control rather than age related-transitions and being 'forced' and 'kicked out'
- Young person led transitions 'desire to be free and independent/survivalist self reliance' and/or level of dissatisfaction with placements (4+ placements marginally higher likelihood of leaving early)
- Warm nurturing environment, compensatory care and a secure stable base in foster care tended to opt to stay
- Relationships, how the offer was framed and the legacy of the past were influential

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Secure stable base

- Availability: helping young people trust
- Sensitivity: helping young people manage feelings and behaviour
- Acceptance: building young people's self esteem
- Co-operation: helping young people feel effective
- Family membership: helping young people belong

(Schofield and Beek, 2009)

Analysis of young people's accounts, plus those of their foster carers and leaving care advisors

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Part of the family: provision of a secure stable base

- We had a really good relationship, and my foster mum she was, talked, like, straight and told me how it is and...like so I felt really comfortable and accepted in the family...I was really settled there. It was nice because it was a big family as well so there were always people around (Kate, Stayed Put, in Munro et al., 2012

Reflections

It is important to:

- Acknowledge that young people have a right to support
- See young people as individuals and take their wishes and feelings into account
- Supportive relationships and emotional support (not just practical provision) matter
- 'Need for a shift in emphasis from incident and episodic service provision to a culture of long term and continuous support' (Learning from Serious Case Reviews, Sidebotham et al., 2016)

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Shaping Outcomes

- Importance of a comprehensive approach across the life course
- Pre-care: early intervention and prevention, family support when problems arise
- In care: timely decision-making and effective care planning, continuity and stability, a nurturing environment and a secure base
- Leaving care: preparation and planning, extended and graduated transitions and 'rights based' rather than 'age related' transitions

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