Care Leavers, Homelessness and the Role of Organisations

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Over-representation

- Approximately 1% of young people in the UK are cared for by the local authority.
- Historically, studies have suggested 20% of homeless people have been in care.
- Over-representation also occurs elsewhere.
- A range of other negative outcomes for young people who have been in care.
Explanations

- Frequently discussed conflict between individual & structural explanations
- For young people, immaturity is an alternative:

“They are straws in the wind, easily blown about by sinister and destructive forces which will manipulate their half-formed minds and young bodies.” (Brandon et al., 1980, p.74).
Age of Leaving / Maturity

- Emotional maturity may have been affected by pre-care or care experience
- Average age of leaving home in UK is 24; much earlier for care leavers
- Care leavers often wished they had stayed in care longer
- Natalier and Johnson (2012) – smooth and volatile paths to independence
Effectiveness of Services

- Huge variations in spending between local authorities, not linked to outcome
- Requirement to form Pathways Plan, but young person not always involved
- Poor services for young offenders
- No effective evaluation of services
- ‘Southwark judgment’ meant to provide clarity but still conflict & confusion
Housing Outcomes

- House of Commons Education Committee:
  - 51% of looked after children aged 16-17 were usually in foster care, 22% in residential care, 4% with their parents and 22% were in ‘other arrangements’.
- Critical of regulation of other arrangements
- Bed and breakfast hotels sometimes being used for extended periods
Background Factors: Newcastle

- Housing acknowledged as major part of the transition from care
- Effective joint working between individuals led to systematic improvements
- Less complaints that agencies did not understand each other’s situation
- Young people seen as children until 18
- Positive response to young people saying they should have stayed in care longer
The Initiative

- Intensive support for those young people who would most need support to live independently
- RAG assessment (part of Pathway Plan) determined readiness for independent living – many ‘bright red’
- Some young people who had lost large numbers of options
Views on Over-representation

- Situation before young people went into care, long term emotional impact
- Anger, post-traumatic stress
- Multiple placements could mean multiple rejection
- Foster placements not suitable for all
- Re-establishing contact with biological family could break emotional resilience
Universal Immaturity

“But you would probably expect 15 year olds to be in amber and need support to prepare meals and learn cooking skills, and need support to shop within budget. I mean most 15 year olds are not going to be green, are they? They’re going to be amber.”
Unsupported Immaturity

‘they are young people and they will spend it on drink instead of food, because that’s the nature of being 17 and 18 ... if you haven’t got a mum to say can you send me £50 – you just don’t have any money – then they’re borrowing money and somebody saying you have to give me 200% interest.’
Young People’s Experiences

- Accounts often minimised circumstances that led to going into care
- One negative experience of care, with moves between mother & foster carers
- More positive reports, e.g. foster carers ‘treat me like their own’
- Improved educational experience & avoiding trouble with the police
Experiences on the Project

- Remained confident about ability to live independently
- Loved freedom: “Like, it’s mine, it’s no one else’s, I don’t have to share it with anyone.”
- One young person isolated from friends
- Appreciated help with financial matters
- Not always willing to ask for help
Views of the Professionals

- Young people who had had no options were given them
- Intensive support beyond what could be provided by social worker
- Built on inter-agency working
- Co-location crucial
- Benefits to young people & financially
References / Reading


References / Reading (2)
