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Care Leavers, Homelessness and the Role of Organisations

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EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE
Families, Housing and Homelessness
Dublin, 25th September 2015



EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS



Working to end homelessness

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



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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



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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



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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



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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.”



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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.’



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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



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