Transitions from Care to Independence: Supporting care leavers to fulfil their potential

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Prospects of 19-year old care leaver in 2016

- NEET no known reason: 24%
- NEET pregnancy/parenting/disability/illness: 15%
- Unknown: 8%
- Higher education: 6%
- Training/employment: 22%
- Education other than higher: 26%
Long-term life outcomes for LAC

- 37% incarcerated 12-18 year olds in 2015-16 had care background (Simmonds 2016)
- 20-30% of homeless have been in care at some point in their lives (Centrepoint 2010, Crisis 2011, Who Cares? Trust)
- ¼ of young women leaving care are pregnant / mothers; nearly ½ mothers by 24
- Estimated that around 70 per cent of sex workers have been in care (Centre for Social Justice, 2013)
Context

- 72,670 children in care, steady rise since 2008 (‘Baby P’ effect) (SFR50/2017)
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) 4,560, up from 1,950 in 2013 (6%)
- Children’s social care system under stress
- Academisation agenda
- Some improvement in GCSE performance:
  - 2016 17.5% 5 A*-C including Maths & English
cw 59% all children
Failure in care?

- 92% have experienced abuse/neglect/family dysfunction/absent parenting
- 45% have mental health/behavioural and emotional difficulties (10%)
- 73% of school age LAC have SEN; 28% have statement (10x general population)
- Relatively small numbers in most schools
- Many enter care with educational deficit
- Transient population, with many entering late
Special educational needs of looked after children, all children and children in need, 2016, England.

Source: CLA-NPD, CIN-NPD
Chart C: Percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March achieving 5 or more GCSES at grades A* to C including English and mathematics by length of period of care
Rationale for study

- Academic achievement key factor in care leavers’ adult well-being (Jackson & Martin 1998; Pecora et al. 2006)
- Care leavers’ educational participation and attainment, especially transitions, under-researched (Bluff et al. 2012)
- Introduction of requirement to remain in education/training to 18 (Education & Skills Act 2008)
- Recent initiatives to improve educational outcomes
  - Designated leads in schools
  - Virtual school heads in local authorities
Aims

- explore how looked-after young people experience educational transitions in Years 11-13; and
- how these transitions might best be supported.

Critical time in young people’s lives because:
- decisions made in Years 11 and 13 likely to influence their future career trajectories and life-chances significantly
- likely also to experience transitions in other areas of their lives during this period
Objectives

1. explore key barriers to academic progress for care leavers at and beyond Key Stage 4;
2. consider interdependence of young people’s experiences in and before entering care and their educational outcomes;
3. assess effectiveness of the virtual school head and designated teacher roles; and
4. examine current legislative and policy environment in the light of the findings with a view to identifying how young people transitioning out of care might best be supported to fulfil their educational potential.
Methods

- Followed 21 care leavers from year 11 – 13
- Annual interviews with young people
- Interviews with 12 designated staff in schools, 3 in FE colleges and 5 virtual school heads
- 65 interviews in total
  - See CFLQ (2012) 24(4) 452 re methods and ethics
- Summary report available at:
  http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/people/academic/driscollj.aspx
Participants

- 12 boys (57%) 9 girls (43%), (national ratio 56:44%)
- 9 white British, 4 Asian, 4 mixed, 3 black, 1 black/mixed
- 10 (56%) under care orders (60% nationally); 7 voluntarily accommodated; 1 remanded into care
- 13 in mainstream schools in Year 11; 3 in Pupil Referral Units (PRU); 2 in special schools; 3 not in education at all
- 3 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- 1 orphan
- 1 teenage mum (child removed)
By the end of the study

- 3 living independently
- 8 awaiting independent accommodation, of which
  - 5 in supported/semi-independent placements
  - 3 in foster care
- 6 expecting to remain in foster placement post 18
- 1 at risk of homelessness (failed to attend housing panel)
- 1 in custody
- 1 will be dependent for life
Theoretical perspectives

- Attachment theory (Bowlby)
- Resilience
- Focal model of adolescence (Coleman)
- Foundational rights (Hollingsworth)
Coleman’s Focal Model of Adolescence

- young people cope with the developmental relationship demands of adolescence by ‘pacing’ themselves/tackling one issue at a time
- young people’s active shaping of their own adaptation is significant factor in ability to cope with tasks of adolescence
- adolescents most likely to experience difficulty are those confronted with multiple challenges simultaneously
- education and social care systems both impose enforced transitions upon young people
- care leavers likely to have limited control over managing the multiple issues arising in adolescence
Foundational rights (Hollingsworth 2013)

- category of rights which support the conditions which will enable a child to exercise ‘full’ autonomy in adulthood
- ‘full’ autonomy includes not just capacity to exercise agency + absence of external constraints: relational concept
- Foundational rights include:
  - educational provision sufficient to develop the child’s capacity for rational decision-making, as well as her future participation in political and community life and
  - protection of nurturing, positive, relationships that go beyond the prioritisation of certain forms of relationship to include also their quality (1062)
State’s duties to care leavers

- **reparatory responsibility**: state’s duty to make amends to young people let down by society before/in care

- **assumed responsibility**: state interference in family life and adoption of parenting role carries obligation to undertake that duty in the manner of a responsible parent

- focal theory + foundational rights + reparatory + assumed responsibilities validate the assumption of ongoing parental obligations to care leavers until such time as they are equipped to exercise full autonomy

- **21st century**: Arnett’s ‘emerging adulthood’ and increased parental support to young people
FINDINGS

Care-related
Entry into care was generally positive

Care was *the best thing that could have ever happened, personally* (Riley)

?For some, earlier entry into care might have reduced the disadvantages they faced upon entry and enhanced their prospects as they approached adulthood
Corporate parenting as intrusive & impersonal

they literally turned up and said right, you’re moving, pack up your stuff (Riley)

I feel like I’m in the Big Brother house….She has to write notes about us and then send them to the social worker…I feel like I’m being watched all the time (Tasmin)

Can’t count…I can’t even remember some of their names…they come and go so quickly (Jacinda)

I was with them for like five years…they’ve decided to let me go and they’ve never like even texted me back…I ain’t gonna really do eff…for people who don’t care about me so…don’t really care to be honest (Habib)
Early independence

I don’t like living with strangers (Priya)

I’ve made roots with them, but not…as strong as if it was my own parents, obviously (Bashir)

I’m gonna move out…because I’m eighteen now, and my guardian…thinks that I’m old enough to move out. How do you feel about that? Scared. (Devora)

at first I couldn’t really handle it, living by myself…every little noise I would hear I would get scared… really paranoid. Yeah, I would just get very lonely (Callum)
Birth family distractions

father I don’t know where he is, this five years I don’t know where my mother is...I knew I’d lost them, there wouldn’t be any way back to find them (Bashir)

I don’t think they are really bothered, because … they’ve just left it for about five years, six years……I don’t want to see any of them no more (Adam)

I used to see her every day and now I don’t see her at all….she got moved to a care home because of her behaviour, drugs all this stuff…Haven’t seen her for months, long, long time…we are not even allowed to call her, only certain times, she’s not allowed to have a phone (Callum)
Multiple transitions from 16-18

*a triple whammy, in terms of disruption* (Mr Brook)

very often…Year 11 is destined to be a nightmare…it’s awful, sometimes… December onwards…you sort of watch it unravel (Ms Teal)

I fight very hard…I get really quite arsey…it’s now accepted I think that they will stay in that placement until they’ve finished their education, so ‘til they leave school (Ms Ford)
Impact of pre/in-care experiences on education

Late entrants into care *are a lot angrier* (Ms Lea)

*I wouldn’t be able to concentrate, and like my mind would wander, and I’d be like worried all the time...I’d always be in trouble* (Tasmin)

*there are all kinds of things that need to go in first before there’s going to be any kind of fruitful learning or engagement* (Ms Mason)
FINDINGS

Education-related
Appreciation of the importance of education

looking at my…real family, I can see they ain’t gone far in life…I want to show other people that a boy who has basically lost four years of his education…there’s no reason why you cannot go far in life, and there’s no reason why you cannot get good grades (Adam)

Every time my social worker sees me. Just about school, school…“that’s important, that’s your future”…had enough in school, and when I come home the same stuff, it’s every day (Sofia)
Professionals focused on raising aspirations and attainment

it’s the Holy Grail…closing the gap…ten years ago…it was “can they be in school”? (Ms Lea)

- virtual schools trained and supported social workers to hold schools to account much better (Mr Steel)

- But difficulties in recruiting educated and engaged foster carers
Figure 12: Overall absence rates (%) for looked after children, all children and children in need, 2013 to 2016, England.

Source: CLA-NPD, CIN-NPD
Most felt they had not reached their educational potential at KS4

- Only 4/21 5 A*-Cs at GCSE in Year 11; at least 3 more did so in Year 12

*I think they kind of used here as a holding space…rather than [Niall] becoming someone, and achieving, and being successful* (Ms Carmine)

*too laid back, they are too soft…some of my teachers don’t even really come in… And it’s hard on my education* (Habib, describing PRU).
Greater support for transition to College at 16

[w]e like them to stay…but we’ve got a woefully bad level 2 offer (Mr Green)

by supporting the transition to college we are far more likely to retain them (Ms Oak Forest Hill FE College)
Support in further education colleges requires strengthening

- 11 participants to FE Colleges: 4 dropped out, 2 excluded

I struggle sometimes...knowing who to speak to and...what's available for our looked-after children from the virtual school (Ms Oak, Forest Hill College) but

it isn’t difficult...once you start having the conversations
Designated teacher role can be highly effective but has inherent limitations

- key role in managing tensions arising from young people’s pastoral needs spilling over into the school environment
- Seniority significant for effective advocacy
  - But less amenable to pastoral care
  - Teachers are not social workers
- High number of exclusions still
  - some designated teachers are struggling to find their voice in schools (Mr Brook)
Permanent exclusions

Figure 14: Permanent exclusion rates (%) for looked after children, all children and children in need, 2011 to 2015, England.

Source: CLA-NPD, CIN-NPD
Virtual school model potentially powerful but under-resourced

social workers don’t have that confidence…they won’t challenge a head teacher (Ms Ford)

The virtual team were excellent…but they were horrifically understaffed (Ms Coral)

the idea that any schools are going to commission our services is ludicrous…because half the time they haven’t got any looked-after children, and…as a head, I know that it wouldn’t be, probably, top of my list (Ms Mason)
RECOMMENDATIONS
Summary of Key Recommendations

1. More focused support to enable young people to continue to make up educational deficits beyond Key Stage 4.
2. Provision of greater support from schools and social workers to enable young people to make a successful transition to college.
3. Consideration to allowing care leavers preferential admission to the Further Education college of their choice.
4. Introduction of designated staff in Further Education colleges.
Summary of Key Recommendations

5. Development of closer links between Further Education colleges and Virtual Schools.

6. Support from Virtual Schools to young people to be extended to the age of 25.

7. Targeted support for young people in educational placements outside mainstream schooling/ disengaged.

8. Support should not discriminate against the most marginalised: policy needs to be revised to ensure this - C&SW Act 2017 extends local authorities’ duties to provide personal advisor, needs assessment and pathway plan to all care leavers to 25, not just those in education/training CA 1989 s23.
Summary of Key Recommendations

9. Consideration to Parental Responsibility for children in care being vested in an individual.

10. Investment in the children’s social care workforce to ensure social workers have the time and skills to make meaningful relationships with children and young people.

11. Consideration to the efficacy of the leaving care team model in comparison to prioritising continuity of social work support at a time of multiple transitions in young people’s lives.