

BBCL: Enhanced Care – The Perspectives of Young People.

Method

20 young people were interviewed by key workers, participation workers or Outcomes UK using an interview schedule and a consistent body of questions. Of the 20 interviewed, 16 fell within the broad group identified as 'Hard to Place', including those with multiple foster care or residential care placements with some having unplanned endings not associated with foster carer illness or similar.

The 16 within the target cohort were aged 14 to 20, characterised themselves as male 8, female 4 and NB 2. This accounted for in excess of 75 years of care experience, over 35 foster care placements and more than 10 residential placements. Some of the children advised the interviewer that they could not remember all of their placements – and some of them (short placements) 'didn't count anyway'. 4 of the children had a sibling in placement with them for part or all of their time in care. 11 of the young people were care leavers.

Summary of findings

The young people's views supported the dynamic nature of placement stability– identifying the interaction of a number of factors including the carers attitude, the strength of the young person's engagement and the nature of support to them and to the placement. All of the young people had been matched to placements – but the majority of young people did not feel involved in this and felt the quality of placements suffered as a result.

Young people recognised the challenging nature of the foster carer role and confirmed other research on the demanding list of personal requirements necessary to fulfil the role of foster carer.

Young people were clear of their role in making a successful placement including their attitude, preparedness to engage (and forgive mistakes) and the speed with which they develop what most referred to as self-understanding – which included self -regulation, and a network of support.

The identified pre-cursors to successful placements included:

- The young person's engagement in the planning process – to creating a plan with the young person.
- Pre- knowledge of the placement supported by a considered introduction to the placement by an adult known to the young person.
- Access to an adult outside of the placement – the social worker, 'trusted adult' or similar- with whom the young person can discuss issues and challenges regarding the placement and who can facilitate a consideration of these leading potentially to changes in the placement.
- Some young people believed that focussed work with an adult could accelerate the personal development that allowed them to achieve stability in placement. This 'trusted adult' role was also a mediator or facilitator for solving issues jointly with the foster carer in placement. Some young people identified that social workers did not have the time for this role and a smaller number of young people identified Fostering Support workers and Education Support Workers filling this role.
- Young people saw the benefit of joint activities with their foster carer, in school and in the community. This was especially valuable at the start of a placement to support the settling in process, provided supportive networks, and appreciation.
- Young people wanted to be involved in formulating how they were to be introduced to others in the community.

Appendix - Findings

Planning

8 of the cohort felt they were involved enough in their care planning, although 11 (including 4 of those that felt involved enough) wanted to be involved more. However, the majority of young people did not believe their involvement in the planning would have resulted in a change to the plan (6).

15 Young people felt that foreknowledge of a placement is important – and 8 felt that they had some knowledge of the majority of their placements.

- 13 felt that a pre visit to placement was important – and comments suggested that the benefit they realised from this was to see their space/ bedroom and to get a chance to meet the carers.
- 13 felt that written or video material would be helpful.
- 16 felt it was important if you are going to a placement to be taken by someone you know.

2 young people felt that meeting outside of the placement for the first time, to see what the carers are really like, would be helpful. One thought an overnight stay would be good, another thought that VR would be one way.

The positive impact of meeting carers before placement was described by all but one of the young people that had experience of it (6 of 7):

“I got to know them – felt less anxious, I had seen my bedroom felt more comfortable and forgiving”

“It made a massive difference I knew what I was getting into”.

“Saw family members and the neighbourhood. I got to plan and see my room (my own space is important to me)”

“I got the basic picture, would have been better to get to know them more with maybe a face-to-face meeting so I could then decide if it was the right move for me”.

One young person felt that ***“It didn’t make a difference – there has to be some trust”***.

The negative impact of the absence of engagement was alluded to in the absence of trust -

“I just got told you are going here.”

“Even if I had visited and got a bad feeling I doubt the social worker would have listened to me”.

“It was more the fact of knowing what is happening as it felt very rushed”.

9 young people felt that the foster carers knew enough about them as they arrived – when asked *‘what should the carers know about them?’*

Some young people thought basic details and likes and dislikes in order that the view of the carers is not prejudiced.

“We get to know each other over time - so just a limited amount of information”.

“Just enough - so they get a chance to make their own opinion”

“How to keep them safe”

“I didn't know what they did know – worrying”

This might indicate additional anxiety caused by a lack of clarity about the process.

A number of young people made mention of the potential for previous behaviour, in the absence of context, undermining a future relationship.

“They knew basic information like why I was in care - but didn't know about me or what caused me to be upset or on edge. It would depend who is telling - so if I ended on a bad note the previous carers would not be presenting the truth only my reaction to the situation”.

Young people had differing views -

“More information but in my words, my views on my past”.

“Find out about me - with me”.

“Children do not want to keep going over what they have gone through so the social worker should make sure it is done before they go to stay with someone”.

But the majority preferred to be involved in describing their history to carers.

When asked about settling in – 4 felt that in most of their placements this was easy – 7 thought ‘as you would expect’ and 5 felt it was difficult. Some of the views expressed included -

“Settling in all about the attitude of the foster carer”.

“Strange home, new people, how would you feel?”

“Contact with family (carers) and extend family helped”

When asked what makes the settling in process better – 14 young people felt that **knowing more about me improved the settling in process** and 2 thought it did not. 12 young people felt **that carers knowing about their behaviour improved settling**, however 3 young people felt it was likely to have the opposite effect, and another showed reservations focussed on previous behaviours being anticipated by the new carers and labelling.

14 thought **carers knowing about their care history improved settling in** and the 15 thought that the foster carer **knowing what the young person liked improved settling in**.

We asked what more could be done to improve settling in? Providing the following suggestions –

- Activities with carers - 12
- Better arrangements for me to do activities outside of the home (with or without carers) - 12
- Foster carers knowing how to introduce me in the wider community - 12
- Someone to talk to outside of the home – who knew about my circumstances - 13
- More contact with family or a family member / sibling - 15
- More contact with friends - 10

A chance to talk to someone outside of the placement was supported by 11 young people as an improvement to service that could facilitate communication – 2 young people referred to the positive relationships they enjoyed with support workers.

“No private time with social worker prevented me raising concerns – carers listening at door”

“Private time with social worker – and not being made to feel bad about it”

“Social workers not saying be there just for the weekend and then being there for long time”.

When asked young people suggested other approaches that would have aided their settling in -

“Family work with my family”

“Issue based work with me?”

“Actually spending the allowances on things for me” (which we took to mean being involved in spending decisions in relation to allowances).

Rules

The nature of rules was discussed with the young people.

13 young people felt rules were clear at the outset, 12 that they were reminded frequently enough and 13 that the rules changed with them as they grew older.

They felt that rules should be, Clear, Simple, Flexible and Consistent. Young people preferred the rules and how rules change to be underpinned by explanation – and for the reminders of the rules to be given periodically rather than just when the rules were broken.

The rules should be equally applied to all children and young people in the house. 4 young people made comments that identified that this was not so in their experience.

“It’s not about rules it’s about attitude”

Whilst all but one of those that expressed a definite opinion (12) said the rules did change with age – 5 felt that these changes were not fast enough.

Introductions

Young people were asked about how foster carers should introduce them to neighbours or friends.

13 young people felt that the manner of their introduction to the community should be agreed with them. 2 felt that young people should simply be described as ‘**staying with us**’ whereas 2 mentioned fostering directly.

The majority felt being supported into activities in the community with carers was a support to integration.

Appreciation and Aspiration

Young people were asked if they felt appreciated in placement by carers and asked for examples – 12 young people felt they had been appreciated and were able to give examples, a further 3 referred to appreciation from other than the carers; whilst 4 could not recall ever being appreciated in placement.

Examples of appreciation **included birthday parties, winning awards, feeling love from the foster family, and being supported to join a football club.**

A number of young people emphasised how impactful it was when foster carers recognised their efforts and achievement.

When asked about being supported in education, most young people thought that regular contact between teachers and the foster carers was more important than other forms of contact including parent’s evenings, after school activities and contact with the school following incidents. Some comments focussed on carers only contacting schools when there were issues.

“Carers only in touch with school when I was in trouble”.

Young people referred to positives in school –

“Helped by Educational Support worker”.

“Getting good grades in my mocks”

“Getting Award for After School Activities”.

“Achieving fantastic GCSEs”

“Helped by my support worker from Child Action Northwest”.

There were comments that indicated that they felt under some scrutiny –

“Not be judged separately as in care”

“Schools knew every single move and step that was made. There was an invisible pressure on my shoulders to be a certain way and act a certain way instead of truly being me”

When asked if there was more that could be done – there were two suggestions of support with homework and one young person suggested support for foster carer and their own children.

Understanding Care Histories

Young people were asked ‘the importance of foster carers understanding why there were in care’. 4 thought it was not important, 3 that it was one of a number of things that were important and **10 thought it was really important or most important.**

The advice offered to carers by young people about histories included –

“If they want to know about your past let them ask you before they jump to conclusions”.

“Be patient I should be in control of what they know about me”.

“Understand the background and show kindness”.

Unplanned Endings

Young people were asked about placements that end in an unplanned way. We asked for the reasons why the placements had ended. We provided some responses–

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| • My behaviour | 5 |
| • My friend’s behaviour | 0 |
| • The people I was mixing with | 3 |
| • Running away | 6 |
| • Breaking rules in placement | 7 |
| • People wanting to hurt me | 3 |
| • Loneliness | 1 |
| • Issues at school | 4 |
| • Foster Carers Illness | 1 |
| • Falling out with other children | 2 |
| • Falling out with carer | 12 |
| • Chastisement, name calling | 2 |

Others added included ***withdrawal from carer 4 (because of disclosure 2), calling me names 3.***

The ‘falling out with’ carers comments were diverse and related to ‘comparison with other children’, ‘rule breaking’ and the provision of various forms of direct support.

We asked what could have been done to help stabilise the placement

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Activities | 6 |
| Therapy | 6 |
| Someone else to talk to | 10 |
| More contact with family | 8 |
| Closer to school | 3 |
| More Friends | 6 |
| More support to foster carers | 7 |

One young person suggested that ***“a person who spoke to the carers and the child improving the placement”*** as avoiding a breakdown and suggested a facilitative / mediative style.

Settled Placements (positive endings)

15 of the young people found a placement they could settle into – we asked what was good about it.

I felt was understood	13
The carers and family were different	6
I was supported	10
I had friends	3
I was more grown up	9
I understood things better	8

We asked if this was- almost of the young people agreed on the approach of the carers and all of the young people felt that they themselves had changed.

We asked if we could have helped them make these changes sooner – and 9 of the young people thought we could have given that help.

Young people said -

“I can now control my behaviour and now have minimal outbursts”

“I learned how to talk about my feelings”.

“I understand them better and this stops the need for me repeating myself”

“I matured - helped by carers”.

One young person with experience of a therapy plan said -

“don’t just thrust it upon the individual do weekly sessions so they have time to reflect on the new information