



CREaTE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Please cite this publication as follows:

Rogers, R. (2014) Taking responsibility for the provision of financial, housing, and emotional support for young people leaving care. *Australian Social Work*, 68 (1). pp. 99-114. ISSN 0312-407X.

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2013.868013>

This version is made available in accordance with publishers' policies. All material made available by CReaTE is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

Contact: create.library@canterbury.ac.uk



Ruth Rogers

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

Abstract

This article explores the financial, housing and emotional support provided to 16-19 year old care leavers, studying in further education in England. Drawing from 28 interviews with social workers and further education college professionals the article discusses the accessibility of existing provision in England, with a particular focus on the relationships and collaborative working practices between further education professionals and social work teams. The article argues that despite the individual commitment of further education professionals, the level of support they provide is, in the main, sketchy, reactive and under-resourced. Given the significant austerity measures implemented by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government, it is now all the more important for both education and social services to adopt a more collaborative interagency approach in order for them to address the complex problems experienced by care leavers studying in further education.

Section 1. Contextual Background

There are significant similarities between the UK, USA and Australia in terms of leaving care policies for children in care. Unfortunately, there are also considerable similarities in terms of the poor social and educational outcomes experienced by care leavers, and it has been argued that all three have '...failed to provide the range of in-care, transitional and post-care supports and services required to ensure improved outcomes for care leavers' (Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006, p. 111). Within the three countries, children in care and care leavers tend to suffer from a disrupted education throughout much of their childhood, with their educational experience affected by frequent moves and instability, and they are far more likely to experience low educational outcomes compared to their peers.

Within the USA, a study of 732 children aged 17-18 years in care in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin showed that 66.8% had been suspended at least once from school and 16.5% had been expelled (compared with 27.8% and 4.6% of all children) (Courtney, Terao and Bost, 2004, p. 42). Similarly, research by Smithgall et al suggested that young people in state care 'lag at least half a school year behind demographically similar students in the same schools' (Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, George and Courtney, 2004, p. 14). Research has also found that young people in care are far more likely than their peers to have to repeat a year at

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

school, and 'Chicago Public School students in out-of-home care were almost twice as likely as other students to be at least a year older for their grade' (ibid, p. 22).

English and Welsh statistics reveal a similarly negative trend and the educational attainment of children in care (or to use the UK term, 'looked after children') continues to be significantly lower than other children. Looked after children not only perform less well than their peers, but their performance continues to fall behind as they get older. In England in 2010-2011, only 31.5% of looked after children achieved five or more grades 'C' or above at their General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), the benchmark of secondary school achievement for 16 year olds (Department for Education, 2011a), compared with 80.5% of all children (Department for Education, 2012). Similarly in Wales, in 2010-11, 29% of young people left care left without any qualifications at all, compared to just 1% of all children (Welsh Audit Office, 2012). Not surprisingly, these educational outcomes go on to affect care leavers later in life, and in 2011 in Wales, care leavers were four times more likely than other young people to not be in education, employment or training on their 19th birthday (ibid). Data on the outcomes for care leavers after their 19th birthday is limited, but it is estimated that in England only 6% of care leavers enter higher education (HE) each year (Department for Education, 2011b), with no reliable data on the proportion of those who go on to complete their studies.

National data on leaving care outcomes for young people in Australia is limited and the research that does exist 'tends to be based on small-scale studies of care leavers in particular states or territories that are mostly descriptive and exploratory in nature...' (Mendes, 2009, p. 33). However, these smaller scale studies are still significant and a study exploring the outcomes for 47 care leavers four to five years after they left care found that only one in four was in full-time employment, education, or a combination of the two, compared with over 70% of 20-24 year olds in the general population (Cashmore and Paxman, 2007). Speaking of findings from the same research with 47 young people, Cashmore wrote: 'Consistent with the findings of research in the UK, the US and Canada, young care leavers in this study were likely to leave school early and without obtaining any qualifications (Cashmore, Paxman and Townsend, 2007, p. 53). It is fair to say that the experiences and particularly the outcomes for care leavers on an international level remains under-researched, with much of the data relying on estimates, snap shot samples, or small scale studies.

UK Education Context and Provision for Care Leavers

This article focuses on the support provided by educational professionals and social services to care leavers studying in further education colleges (FE Colleges). As such, it is important to provide some contextual background to the UK experience, in terms of the post-compulsory

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

education pathways available to young people and the statutory duties social services have toward looked after children and care leavers.

For clarification, in England and Wales the term FE is used to describe post-compulsory education that continues beyond the education provided by secondary schools. This type of education is quite distinct from higher education, which is generally provided by universities and is at a higher level than that provided by secondary schools. Instead, FE is primarily taught in FE colleges but also includes sixth form colleges, specialist colleges (such as agriculture or drama and dance) or adult education colleges. Compared to HE, FE colleges have more similarities with the community colleges of the US and tend to provide less 'academic' courses with a heavier focus on work-based learning.

There have been considerable changes made to education provision for young people in England and Wales, including the increase in the cap on university fees from £3,000 to £9,000 a year in 2010, the ending of Aimhigher (a government funded initiative aimed at encouraging widening participation in post-compulsory education amongst students from non-traditional backgrounds), and the effective closure of Connexions services, an agency with responsibility for providing impartial advice on careers and education to 13-19 year olds. Significantly, although in principle, Connexions was inclusive and available to all young people aged 13 to 19, in practice, it primarily targeted those who were disadvantaged and in danger of becoming unemployed. In 2007 it was announced that the compulsory education participation age would increase from 16 to 17 in 2013, and again to 18 in 2015 (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). These changes mean that all young people will have to be engaged in some form of 'training' whether it is at school, college or through work-based training. Although there are concerns that the new compulsory age may lead to a shortage of alternative education opportunities for young people, who may be forced onto unsuitable courses (Woodin, McCulloch, and Cowan, 2012, p. 10), the changes should have particularly positive benefits for care leavers, who remain significantly under-represented in education after the age of 16. However, these changes have put additional pressures on FE colleges to support young people, not only in terms of providing appropriate training and educational opportunities, but also with careers guidance and social support. This is all the more significant given the status of FE colleges in the UK, where traditionally, students attending FE college are more likely to have literacy and numeracy problems, opt for vocational courses and are often disillusioned learners, whose experiences of school have been difficult.

Significantly, there have also been a number of relevant legal and policy developments in England and Wales that have influenced social care responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. In 2007, the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (Department for

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

Education and Skills, 2007) proposed a range of measures aimed at improving social and educational outcomes for care leavers and reducing the number of young people leaving care early. The 'Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme' was piloted in 11 local authorities between 2008 and 2011. It was targeted at young people with 'established familial relationships' with their foster carers and offered them the opportunity to remain with their existing carers until they reached the age of 21 (Munro, Lushey, National Care Advisory Service, Maskell-Graham, Ward, with Holmes, 2012). Since then revised statutory guidance on planning transition to adulthood for care leavers has been introduced which requires local authorities to develop 'staying put' policies. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 also placed a statutory duty on local authorities to provide care leavers with assistance to enable them to meet their educational and training needs up until the age of 25 (with some variations in entitlement depending on disability, special educational needs, age at which the young person came into care, and length of time in care).

Although significant, these moves have still been criticised for not going far enough in protecting young people once they leave care (Care Leavers Association, 2010; Rogers, 2011a). Data suggests that although the age at which young people leave care is slowly on the increase, they still tend to be considerably younger than their peers, and in 2011 63% of young people left care when they were 18 years old, 18% when they were 17 years old and 19% left care when they were only 16 years old (National Care Advisory Service, 2011). In addition, although some care leavers may now have the '*opportunity*' to stay with their foster carers until the age of 21, the reality remains very different, and in 2010-2011 only 4% of care leavers actually continued to live with their previous foster carers after they turned 19 (Department for Education, 2011b). The White Paper was also criticised for falling short of what should be expected from a 'responsible parent'. Indeed, Jackson argued that a key factor contributing to the low educational attainment of looked after children is 'the low priority given to education by professionals and carers (the 'corporate parents') as compared with the intense concern that 'real' parents display towards their children's education' (Jackson, 2010, p. 4).

Also relevant to this research is The Southwark Judgement of 2009. The Judgement clarified that social services have a duty to accommodate homeless 16 and 17 year olds, which also has a bearing upon access to leaving care services and support under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. In brief, the Southwark Judgement was the result of a claim made by a young person against London Southwark Council in 2007 after he was evicted at aged 17 by his mother and made homeless. Once evicted, he applied to Southwark Social Services to be placed in care. Southwark Social Services found that because he did not have any additional needs or vulnerabilities, he was not eligible to be placed in care and should just apply for housing support from the local council housing department. However, the House of Lords

subsequently ruled that he *should* have been placed in care and accommodated under the Children Act of 1989 by social services because he was homeless and needed accommodation (and not just 'help with accommodation'). The ruling also meant that the young person subsequently became entitled to leaving care support, including having a pathway plan and personal advisor up until at least the age of 21. This ruling drew attention to the vast numbers of 16 and 17 year olds who had previously only been supported by local council housing departments rather than social services and had not been provided with any support other than housing. In effect, the Judgement clarified the statutory duties of social services which led to increased demands and had significant resource implications. It has also led to on-going disputes between local authority housing departments and social services regarding the financial responsibility for the housing costs of care leavers once they turn 16. To illustrate, although figures are improving from previous years, research in 2010 found that young people were still more likely to be dealt with by housing officers than social workers and of the 6,677 homeless 16-17 year olds seeking help from councils in the first 10 months of 2010, 62% were dealt with by housing departments and only 38% were actually seen by social workers (Inside Housing, 2011). Consequently, this research comes at a time when there have been substantial increases in the demands placed on both social services and FE colleges.

Methods

This article reports on findings from research conducted in 2010 in the South East of England, exploring the extent, nature and appropriateness of financial, housing and emotional support provided to care leavers during their transition into independence, and while they were in post-compulsory education (with a particular focus on provision for young people aged 16-19, studying in FE college). Although it is acknowledged that only a relatively small proportion of care leavers continue to study beyond compulsory education, their experiences, together with the experiences of FE professionals are under researched. Estimates suggest up to 40% of 19 year old care leavers (National Care Advisory Service, 2012) continue with any formal education compared to approximately 85% of other 19 year olds (Department for Education, 2013). Some limited snapshot data is available on the numbers of care leavers who enrol in post-compulsory education, but very little is known of what happens to them after enrolment. Similarly, although official information is available on their formal 'entitlement', little is known of how this is translated into practice, or of the experiences of FE professionals and social workers who are tasked with providing them with services and support. The research was funded by Aimhigher, a UK government funded national programme aimed to widen participation in post-compulsory education by increasing opportunities for, and raising aspirations of under-represented young people.

The research involved a total of 28 interviews. Seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted with student support staff from all seven of the FE colleges in the South East of England; three student support staff from each of the local universities; and five social workers with specific responsibility for looked after children and care leavers. A further three telephone interviews were conducted with social workers. Interviews with social workers were facilitated by the researcher approaching all seven social worker teams in the local region with responsibility for care leavers and requesting voluntary participation in the research. Following this, five social workers agreed to be interviewed, and a further three agreed to a telephone interview only. Three of the social workers interviewed were front line staff and five held senior management roles. Interviews with FE colleges were obtained through contacting all seven colleges in the region and requesting participation in the research, specifically from employees in student support. Both social workers and college staff were given the opportunity to withdraw their consent to be involved in the research at any time, and ensured their anonymity would be protected.

Section 2. Research Findings

This article now reports on the findings from interviews with FE colleges and social services, including the: a) lack of clarity between agencies as to their respective responsibilities for care leavers (and in some instances, young people classed as 'homeless'); b) financial support provided by FE colleges and c) limitations to the support provided by FE colleges.

Lack of Clarity regarding Responsibility for Young People

During interviews with FE college professionals and social workers there was evidence of confusion, with both agencies disagreeing on what should be expected from the other in terms of providing both emotional and financial support to care leavers. These differences ranged from one senior social work manager being very explicit that colleges should not have *any* involvement in the provision of financial or housing support for care leavers, to other social workers complaining that the level of support they felt college based student support services provided to care leavers was inadequate. For example, during interviews with social services, one senior social worker manager commented that student problems regarding housing and finance have nothing to do with colleges, and it is 'not their responsibility to get involved in this'. This particular social worker felt that some students 'play the system' and complain to their college only after social services have considered their application for funding, but not provided them with 'exactly the answer they want'. Conversely, another social worker felt that FE colleges should be *directly* involved in facilitating housing provision for students, stating:

'I highlighted [a student] to the college to get some support, but I'm not sure how much support he got. He blew all his money and was constantly coming

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

back to say he had no food... I haven't been very impressed by them, because [students] drop out and I haven't seen that the support is there. I might be highlighting people, but they still drop out and then I get phone calls from the young people saying 'can you sort out accommodation?' But we're people stretched here.' (Social Worker)

However, concerns amongst colleges and social services regarding the level of emotional, financial and housing support provided for care leavers were far more frequently mentioned by FE colleges, who spoke in detail of examples where they felt social services had not made adequate provision for care leavers. Speaking of more emotional support, one FE college student support officer explained:

'One student's social worker just *wouldn't* come and see him, they kept saying they were too busy and then they would ring and say they couldn't make it after they'd eventually set the date. It can be frustrating for me as *social services* are responsible for looking after them. You know, it's supposed to be their *social worker*... but that's often what I often I end up doing, bits in the middle.' (FE College)

There had also been significant issues concerning the support for young people who had not technically been 'in care', but had been evicted from the family home and made homeless. Illustrating this issue, one FE college professional explained that one of their biggest problems was providing support for young people who were not technically considered 'care leavers' but were simply classed as 'homeless'. Speaking of this group of young people, when asked who should take responsibility for financially supporting them with accommodation and funding, another FE college professional said: 'Actually the responsibility tends to get pushed around, especially when they turn 18... the local authority will try to get out of it.' When asked the same question in a different college, another member of staff reiterated: 'Well social services are supposed to, but again they sometimes push it off'. Other FE colleges made more specific reference to complications following the Southwark Judgement in 2009, reinforcing the concern that the ruling had led to an increase in disagreements between council housing departments and social services regarding who has responsibility for homeless young people. As another FE college professional explained:

'We've got a particular situation at the moment with homeless young people. They're under 18 and nobody's taking responsibility. Social services are supposed to and there's a battle going on. For example, what happens now is that if someone is thrown out of home and they're under 18, as far as the college is concerned, that is a child protection issue. What used to

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

happen is, I would go down to the council with the young person until someone would sort it. Whereas now, there's been some sort of ruling where some judge, in his wisdom, put the responsibility back onto social services but social services are saying: 'No we don't have a duty of care, because they're not a child in need'. They'll ask for a child in need referral form to be filled in. So you spend hours with this young person filling in the form, and about a week later they'll send it back saying we've assessed this referral and it's not a child in need.' (FE College)

Another FE college describing the same problem commented how the local housing authority used to pay for emergency bed and breakfast for young people who had been made homeless, but:

'Now they say it is not their responsibility and social services say it's not *their* responsibility so it's an impossible situation. There are lots of young people who are basically sofa surfing and have got nowhere to go, while the agencies battle it out.' (FE College)

Although the Southwark Judgement clarified social services statutory duties, interviews suggested problems relating to both the implementation and shared understanding of their various roles and responsibilities between FE colleges, social services and housing. Within the context of the disadvantage already experienced by care leavers (and homeless young people), it is vitally important for them to receive appropriately targeted housing and financial provision. If the poor educational outcomes experienced by care leavers are to be reduced, rather than being required to engage in claims and appeals for financial and housing support, care leavers are likely to require access to even more specialist supported accommodation options than their peers. As Wade and Dixon argue: 'Greater attention should be given to their needs at the pathway-planning stage, involving much closer and more consistent collaboration between agencies to ensure that they do not miss out, and long-term support to enable them to manage their lives more successfully in the community.' (Wade and Dixon, 2006, p. 206).

Financial Support Provided to Care Leavers by Colleges

All of the seven FE colleges included in the study claimed to provide some additional support to care leavers. This support included ensuring students had access to 365 day a year accommodation (as they do not have the option of 'going home' out of term time) and providing specific mentoring and financial aid, including providing access to bursaries and help filling out forms. However, FE college staff commented that the majority of their time spent on supporting care leavers was focused on student finance, which included assisting students with applications for Learner Support Funds (a discretionary fund for students

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

facing financial hardship); Adult Learning Grants (depending on eligibility, a grant of up to £30 a week to help pay for travel, books and materials) and the Education Maintenance Allowance (an allowance since abolished by the Conservative–Liberal Coalition Government in 2011), paid to students aged 16-19 from lower income households). In the majority of instances, colleges had also paid limited discretionary awards to care leavers, who for a multiple of reasons had been unable to get funding elsewhere (this included money to tide them over for short periods of time, and travel costs to attend interviews to support university applications). Speaking of this discretionary fund, one FE college professional commented:

‘We’ve had students who’ve gone into houses where it’s not been appropriate for them to move in, and of course the *inevitable* has happened... It’s all gone pear shaped and they need to get out. If we have the sufficient monies we can usually fund it from our discretionary funds, but unfortunately [we] don’t have a great wad of money waddling about, you know.’ (FE College)

Other colleges spoke of the financial difficulties faced by care leavers, and all of them stated there had been occasions where they had provided some direct financial support to care leavers, in preference to ‘relying on or waiting for social services’. As another FE college professional explained:

‘We have had them where they are on catering courses and that [costs] quite an extensive amount of money, about £300 for a kit. So we have helped them with the kit. We have also had situations where we have looked after children who are struggling financially... we have helped them by getting them meals at the college on a short term basis or helped them manage their money.’ (FE College)

There was evidence of some colleges going to significant lengths to either provide care leavers with financial support, or to assist them in accessing other agencies where they might gain support. Describing the level of involvement sometimes taken by colleges in supporting students, one FE college professional commented:

‘We’ve had students where we’ve actually had to *find* them accommodation, you know, things have gone wrong with their accommodation and I’ve actually had to sort it for them. I’ve actually had to find this, I’ve spoken to the [housing shelter] to see if there’s any accommodation, I’ve contacted the

council about accommodation as well. I've got them some emergency funding.' (FE College)

This focus on financial support offered to care leavers is perhaps unsurprising given that financial constraints account for a key cause of student withdrawal from post-compulsory education. However, in addition to financial support, all seven colleges were also found to be providing emotional support to care leavers and all commented on the value in having strong mentoring and counselling teams for young people. Previous research into the benefits of mentoring suggests that schools can often make a significant contribution to the development of 'resilience' in young people (Rogers, 2011b). Godshalk and Sosik argue that 'an effective mentoring relationship suggests an emotional alignment between mentor and protégé, understanding, caring and genuineness' (2000, p. 307). Although all colleges emphasised the value in providing emotional support to young people, the precise forms of support varied from institution to institution, ranging from the more ad hoc, 'drop in' approach with student support staff and counsellors, to more structured schemes whereby all identified looked after children were offered the opportunity to have a senior management team member acting as their personal advocate. Speaking of the emotional support provided to care leavers, one college professional commented:

'Sometimes it's just that initial building of a rapport with them, which is really good because it's someone to trust, to help them.' (FE College)

Similarly, another member of staff explained the value in establishing friendships with care leavers and treating them as an individual rather than a 'case':

'I have a really good rapport with one student. We have a joke and she'll tell me what she's been up to and sometimes it's just about that short and very brief relationship, she knows who you are, and she's comfortable to come to you and doesn't feel as though... she feels as though she is getting something *from* it, that she's not just a *case*, not just a bit of paper of someone who is just going to sign some forms for and walk away from.' (FE College)

Although various levels of emotional support were provided in all of the institutions, professionals from four of the seven colleges interviewed said they felt constricted by financial barriers and other work commitments, believing that they should be able to provide *much* more than they currently were. By comparison, in the remaining three colleges, student support teams had developed highly personalised support for young people. In these instances, there was a clear sense that the staff had not only an 'open door

policy', but a strong personal investment in the young people and a commitment to ensuring the support offered was highly personalised, and shaped by the individual needs of the young people concerned. From the interviews and observations, these approaches required a close knit working team (with clear roles and responsibilities), and an extremely strong commitment by both the staff on the ground, and the senior management team. Comments from the colleges with more developed support mechanisms in place included:

'I was told this is a job, but we are not here for us, we are here for the *students* and I've stuck to that pretty much all my life at college, that's pretty much how it should be... It's when a student leaves here with the qualifications, skills and abilities to go out and work or go to uni that makes us a success. And it's *them* that make us a success, not us.' (FE College)

and:

'For a lot of them it's the first time anyone has bothered to spend a bit of time on them and to encourage them to do something and say "Well done".'
(FE College)

Research suggests that this sense of 'personal investment' is very highly valued by young people, and a frequent complaint made by looked after children is that the support they receive by care givers is seen as 'contractual', rather than based on care givers having a personal investment in them. The notion of feeling 'cared for' is significant, as it is central to a young persons' development of resilience and stability. Also significant is the belief that a 'dependable and supportive adult has made a personal investment (however small) in supporting their welfare, and that this investment is based on understanding and care' (Rogers, 2011a, p. 420).

Limitations to College Led Support: Information Sharing

Professionals from all seven FE colleges identified the need to develop provision for care leavers and all those interviewed felt they could do more for care leavers. Ideas from FE college professionals regarding systems they would like to put in place included: visiting feeder schools to meet young people before they apply to college; running sessions on existing care leaver events organised by other agencies; providing taster days for care leavers and ensuring greater awareness and training amongst pastoral support workers and personal tutors. All felt they would like to be able to provide more proactive, rather than reactive support, and providing reactive support was commonly cited as a major concern. As one FE college professional commented:

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

'Time constraints and not having enough people on the team is a big problem, because there's so much we want to do, and so much we *need* to do. If you had more people, or a bigger team, we could do so much more. We work in a very reactive environment. A tutor could bring a student down to me any minute who's been beaten up by their parents last night, and then everything goes out the window. You spend half a day trying to sort some stuff out for them.' (FE College)

Similarly, a professional in another FE college explained:

'There just aren't enough people to do the role. I think last year I saw over 200 people in the space of a year, and most of those young people had complicated issues that needed sorting out. I can refer them on to other agencies, and in half term and holidays I'll trace it back and follow up. Even that will throw up a huge amount of other work, in that some of them may have gone to see a counsellor, but didn't like them, but still may want counselling, someone who was going to go somewhere else, and hasn't been. So it is a massive amount of work keeping up with all those things.' (FE College)

Significantly, the tendency towards providing primarily reactive support was exacerbated by limited information sharing procedures between colleges and social services, which resulted in colleges remaining largely unaware of students' care status unless individual students self-identified as a care leaver. As one college professional commented: 'It's very frustrating not knowing who they are, because there's a lot of work going on that we can offer our care leavers, but if we don't know who they are...' Concerns regarding identification of care leavers were threaded throughout all of the interviews with colleges, with typical comments including: a) 'The problem we have is that we don't know who the care leavers are'; b) 'That's probably one of the biggest problems because we don't know who they are. It's only if the social worker was to contact us to let us know they are here, otherwise we have absolutely no idea'; and c) 'We have bursaries we can help them with, but if we don't know who they are - we can't help them'.

Most FE college professionals commented that the only way they could currently identify care leavers would be if the student disclosed the information on their application form. Applications to Further and Higher Education are processed through the centralised Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and since 2010, the UCAS application form included the option for applicants to self-identify as looked after children or care leavers. However, this method of identification was considered by the colleges as being not

only incomplete, but highly problematic as students felt it de-personalised them and they were reluctant to tick the box without knowing what would happen to the information.

There were some instances of social workers and colleges communicating regarding the care status of students, and some social workers claimed to have established a relatively strong working relationship with colleges, and would aim to contact the college (with the student's permission) if they had a care leaver who they knew would be enrolling. However, social workers explained that this process was far from 'formalised' and 'often doesn't happen, depending on who the case worker is and how busy they are'. As one social worker described:

'It's just astronomical, and there isn't the information being fed at all. And I suppose we have people who are not providing information they should. Although we have a referral system, we haven't actually done it as much as we should have. It should kick in at the transfer really and then in doing applications to college... It doesn't. We're just not using it enough.' (Social Worker)

Other social workers explained: 'I suppose it has come down to me to do it. It's not formalised' and 'I suppose it's a lack of a process really. There isn't a formalised process.' Another social worker explained: 'I think it is something that needs to be more thought out. We all really need to tighten up that procedure and have that referral process...'

Both social workers and FE college professionals interviewed in this research highlighted concerns over the negative impact of restricted interagency communication. It is hoped that a more developed and formalised collaboration between what might be considered 'likeminded' agencies could encourage a more holistic agenda, whereby agencies would be better placed to deal with the more complex social problems characterising the experience of looked after children and care leavers. However, a successful partnership of this type is reliant on agencies working together on an equal footing, and drawing on collective experience and expertise, which includes ensuring an absolute clarity about purpose, roles and responsibilities (Rowe, 2006, p. 213).

Discussion

Looked after children and care leavers tend to emerge from disadvantaged families and excluded groups, having experienced family breakdown and low parental support or neglect (Gaskell, 2010). Care leavers are particularly vulnerable to poor educational and social outcomes because of their pre care experiences, but this is compounded by their experiences of accelerated transitions into adulthood and limited ongoing support once

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

they leave care (Mendes, Johnson and Moslehuddin, 2011). If the care system is to compensate for these earlier experiences, and provide care leavers with opportunities for a more positive future, it needs to be sufficiently flexible and responsive enough to address the needs of individual children (Hannon, Wood and Balzagette, 2010).

There have been some moves to enhance (and acknowledge) the levels of support provided to care leavers by FE colleges, and in 2011, The Buttle UK Quality Mark (an award previously only given to universities, in recognition of the quality of the support offered to care leavers) was piloted to extend to FE colleges. Within the first 18 months of the pilot, 18 FE colleges were awarded the mark (including two from this study). Gaining the Buttle UK Quality Mark, demonstrates the commitment of the institution to supporting the needs of care leavers, and assurance to young people that 'their educational establishment will meet all their needs, including their educational needs.' (Buttle UK, 2011). However, the levels of support provided by FE colleges are, in the main, sketchy, reactive and under-resourced. With the additional pressures now being placed on FE colleges, there are no immediate signs of this improving and under the new austerity measures implemented by the UK Conservative-Liberal Coalition Government, support for care leavers entering post-compulsory education is likely to be less rather than more accessible. These austerity measures include abolishing the Education Maintenance Allowance of £30 for students aged 16-19 from lower income households, and cutting overall funding for FE by 20% over the next four years (the largest budget cut since the 1950s and one likely to have a deleterious effect on the ability of colleges to issue further discretionary awards). In addition, unless matched by significant increases in resources, the raising of the compulsory education participation age is likely to have an extremely negative impact on the capacity of FE colleges to provide direct, bespoke support to those most in need. If the care system is to support positive outcomes for care leavers and provide opportunities for them to develop their own resilience, it must provide appropriately targeted financial, housing and emotional support before they leave care, and during their transition to independence.

In the light of new UK austerity measures, it is now all the more important for both education and social services to adopt a more collaborative interagency approach that would enable them to effectively target resources and knowledge, and address the complex problems experienced by care leavers. The 2007 White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change (Department for Education and Skills 2007); the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Southwark Judgement of 2009 were all intended to either clarify responsibilities for care leavers or increase their access to services. However, this research suggests that social services struggle to meet their increased statutory obligations and it is still not always clear to those working 'on the ground' whether homeless young people are the responsibility of local housing teams or social services. Whilst FE colleges are often

placed (or place themselves) in the middle of these disputes, ultimately, it is the young person who is most negatively affected.

A basic tenet of the 2009 Southwark Judgement was that it placed trust in local authorities to ensure that homeless young people would be properly assessed and provided with suitable accommodation and support. However, this research suggests that the system is not yet working, and there needs to be regional and national agreement on the obligations and roles and responsibilities of social services, housing departments and FE colleges regarding the support for care leavers that starts from the basic principle of 'What does this young person need and how can we make sure they get it.' Social services and FE colleges need to develop more holistic approaches to supporting care leavers, including establishing respectful information sharing strategies that enable FE colleges to identify care leavers and provide more strategic, comprehensive support at the beginning of enrolment. Although this will not address the challenges facing social services, equipping FE colleges with the information required to establish appropriate networks of support and understanding within the education system, may at least go some way to alleviating some of the pressures facing these young care leavers.

References

- Buttle UK. 2011. *Government to look at widening scope of our Quality Mark*. Buttle UK News Page, 31 March 2011 (consulted April 2013).
<http://www.buttleuk.org/news.php/21/government-to-look-at-widening-scope-of-our-quality-mark>.
- Care Leavers Association. 2010. *Care Matters White Paper*, (consulted November 2012)
www.careleavers.com/carematters.
- Cashmore, J., & Paxman, M. 2007. *Longitudinal Study of Wards Leaving Care*. Sydney, Social Policy Research Centre.
- Cashmore, J., Paxman, M., and Townsend, M. 2007. The Educational Outcomes of Young People 4–5 years after Leaving Care: An Australian Perspective. *Adoption and Fostering*, 31(1), 50 - 61.
- Courtney, M., Terao, S. & Bost, N. 2004. *Mid-West Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care in Illinois, Chicago*. Chapin Hall Centre for Children, University of Chicago.
- Department for Education. 2011a. *Outcomes for Children Looked after by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2011*. ref SFR30/2011 (consulted November 2012), available at: www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00200452/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-as-at-31-march-2011.

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

- Department for Education. 2011b. *Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2011* <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001026/index.shtml>.
- Department for Education. 2012. *GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England 2010/11*. ref SFR03/2012 (consulted November 2012), available at: www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001057/index.shtml.
- Department for Education. 2013. *Destinations of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 Pupils: 2010 to 2011*. Main National Tables KS4: SFR19/2013, OSR19/2013, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2010-to-2011>.
- Department for Education and Skills. 2007. *Raising Expectations: Staying in Education and Training Post-16*. ref cm7065 (consulted March 2013), available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Cm%207065.pdf>.
- Gaskell, C. 2010. "If the Social Worker had Called at Least it Would Show they Cared": Young Care Leaver's Perspectives on the Importance of Care. *Children and Society*, 24(2), 136 – 147.
- Godshalk, V. & Sosik, J. 2000. Does Mentor-Protégé Agreement on Mentor Leadership Behaviour Influence the Quality of a Mentoring Relationship. *Group and Organisation Management*, 25(3), 291 - 313.
- Hannon, C., Wood, C., Bazalgette, L. 2010. *In Locos Parentis*, Published by Demos.
- Inside Housing. 2011. 'Who cares' (consulted November 2012), available at: www.insidehousing.co.uk/who-cares/?/6513139.article.
- Jackson, S. 2010. *Education for Social Inclusion: Can we Change the Future for Children in Care?* Based on Inaugural Professorial Lecture delivered at the Institute of Education. 27th April 2010. London, Institute of Education.
- Mendes, P. 2009. Young People Transitioning from State Out-of-Home Care: Jumping Hoops to Access Employment. *Family Matters*, 83, 32 - 38.
- Mendes, P. & Moslehuddin, B. 2006. From Dependence to Interdependence: Towards Better Outcomes for Young People Leaving State Care. *Child Abuse Review*, 15(2), 110 – 126.
- Mendes, P., Johnson, G., and Moslehuddin, B. 2011. *Young People Leaving State out-of-home Care: A Research-based study of Australian Policy and Practice*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- Munro, E.R., Lushey, C., National Care Advisory Service, Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H. with Holmes, L. 2012. *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot: Final Report* London: Department for Education, Research Report DFE-RR191.
- National Care Advisory Service. 2011. *Statistical Briefing: Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2011* (consulted November 2012), available at: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/e7186fad64003f1f923d30a80243e38f.pdf>

Taking Responsibility for the Provision of Financial, Housing and Emotional Support for Young People Leaving Care

- National Care Advisory Service. 2012. *Statistical Briefing: Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2012* (consulted August 2013), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2010-to-2011>
- Roberts, A. 1998. The Androgynous Mentor: Bridging Stereotypes in Mentoring. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 6(1/2), 18 - 30.
- Rogers, R. 2011a. "I remember thinking, why isn't there someone to help me? Why isn't there someone who can help me make sense of what I'm going through?": Instant Adulthood and the transition of young people out of state care. *Journal of Sociology*, 47(4), 411 - 426.
- Rogers, R. 2011b. Evaluating Community Based Interventions for Young People: Measuring the Impact of Effective Mentoring?. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 19(2), 159 - 168.
- Rowe, M. 2006. Abusive Partnerships: New Forms of Governance, New Forms of Abuse?. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 26 (5-6), 207 - 219.
- Smithgall, C., Gladden, R., Howard, E., George, R., and Courtney, M. 2004. *Educational Experiences of Children in out-of-home Care*. Chapin Hall Centre for Children at the University of Chicago.
- Wade, J. & Dixon, J. 2006. Making a Home, Finding a Job: Investigating Early Housing and Employment Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care. *Child and Family Social Work* (11), 199 – 208.
- Welsh Audit Office. 2012. *The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children*. (consulted November 2012), available at: http://www.wao.gov.uk/assets/englishdocuments/ELAC_2012_English.pdf
- Woodin, T., McCulloch, G., & Cowan, S. 2012. Raising the Participation Age in Historical Perspective: Policy Learning from the Past? *British Education Research Journal* (early view: online only), (consulted March 2013), available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/01411926.2012.668871/pdf>