Factors influencing the quality of residential child care

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Presentation outline

- Quality issues in England
- Research overview: Leadership, resource use and outcomes in residential child care (some slides are background only)
- Key messages
- Prevailing issues for quality of residential child care

Residential provision in England

- c6,000 live in residential homes (boys: 64%, girls: 36%)
- Most are over 12 years old (average age of residents: 14.6)
- Duration of placements is similar to foster placements, although fewer last longer than a year – 19% compared with 33%
- More than a quarter have at least five previous placements
- More likely to be living away from local communities (than foster care)
- 63% placed in private or voluntary provision
- High levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Lower attainment levels in Key Stage examinations than other children

Source: DfE (2014)

Chief driver of reform: ‘attainment’

‘An opportunity to move away from prescription and towards supporting professional judgement by:
- setting out in regulation the outcomes that children must be supported to achieve while living in children’s homes;
- replacing the current National Minimum Standards with a Guide to the regulations that will explain and supplement the requirements stated in the regulations; and
- streamlining and modernising the current regulations on management and administrative processes to allow managers and staff in homes to focus on providing quality care for children.’
Research overview

- Leadership, resource use and outcomes in residential child care
- Research team: Leslie Hicks, Ian Gibbs, Sarah Byford, Helen Weatherly
- Part of the government funded research initiative 'Costs and effectiveness of services for children in need'

In the 'Leadership' study we aimed to:

- Describe and measure the practice of managers, use of resources, and costs
- Assess the impact of these on: morale and unity of staff group; quality of the residential environment; changes in the young people over one year
- Assess the applicability of findings to practice and to the experience of staff and managers

Ways of thinking about quality of care in children's homes

- **Structure** – stable characteristics of providers of care, resources available, physical and organisational settings
- **Process** – activities that take place between those who provide care and those who receive it
- **Outcomes** – aspects of well-being (social, psychological and physical) that can be linked to care provided

Data collection and analysis

- **Quantitative** – use of 14 questionnaires at two points in time
- **Qualitative** – interviews with managers of homes and with staff groups
- **Economics** – costs data from each home and organisation
- **Multi-level modelling** (MLM), nesting each level of analysis

Diversity: care hours (per young person per week)

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<td>to young people</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65.3</td>
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Economic analysis: summary

- Higher costs significantly associated with location (South) and high staff:resident ratio
- Better outcomes associated with longer lengths of stay, for those who reported lower ‘pressure to temptation’ prior to entry to the home
- Total costs per resident per week were not found to be related to young people's wellbeing
- Costs and outcomes of homes were similar across sectors
What do effective managers of children's homes do?

- Much more than (but including) the administration of a bureaucratic system
- Create, maintain, develop and influence their staff teams – coherence
- Share roles and responsibilities – empowerment
- Responsibility and authority
- Establish a collaborative culture which they lead and develop
- Enable goal-oriented practice
- Work across the boundary of the home, with wider networks, including parents and carers

Effective managers and their organisations

- Establish credibility
- Maintain autonomy
- Identify and access sufficient support
- Identify and access sufficient supervision
- Be involved in wider strategic management
- Identify and access external development opportunities

Feel valued and respected within the parent organisation

Effective managers' ways of working with young people

- Positive approaches
- Consistency across the group while focusing on individual needs
- Knowing and understanding young people's needs and characteristics
- Building relationships – internally and externally

Drawing together the different levels of analysis (MLM)

Where managers had clear well-worked out strategies for behaviour and education, young people were less likely to be excluded from school, or convicted or cautioned while in the home; expressed more favourable views about the social climate of the home; were happier on some measures; were seen as functioning better by their social workers. Staff had higher morale; felt that they received clearer and better guidance; felt that the young people behaved better.

Main findings

Major differences in ways homes function; outcomes not determined by numbers of staff, or by costs of homes

What matters?

Managers are accepted as embodying good practice from within a clear ethos

Managers have positive strategies for young people's behaviour and education and can enable staff to reflect/deploy these

Main message?

The influence of process on outcomes is paramount

Prevailing issues for quality of residential child care in England

- Managers: selection and appointment; support and supervision; capacity building; monitoring and endorsing practice
- Staff: status, experience and qualification; risk; ratios; prior experience
- Young people: care in groups; placement duration; risk and procedural requirements; strategies and support for practice; relationship of residential care to what comes next
- Training: home and group oriented; learnings shared within homes; links between care standards, inspections, and providing care?
Leadership is inspiring to fellow workers to strive to achieve best outcomes for young people. Leadership is firm but fair, anti-discriminatory, empowering and open. Some staff however do not like to be managed and cannot live up to the expectations the manager requires. This can lead to friction within the staff team.

Regular supervision and staff meetings take place. Manager is very good at delegating tasks and giving workers ‘ownership’ of their duties.

Bibliography

Themes to consider
- What do you think of as ‘good leadership’ (GL) in children’s homes?
- What difference does GL make to staff teams (e.g. recruitment, retention, morale)?
- What difference does GL make to the quality of practice and outcomes for young people?
- What helps those working in children’s homes to become good leaders?