

# ACCESS ALL AREAS - A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

## CORPORATE PARENTING FROM CARE TO ADULTHOOD: A RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Professor Mike Stein

### THE CHALLENGE OF CORPORATE PARENTING

For most young people today, moving in to their own accommodation, entering further or higher education, finding satisfying employment, and achieving good health and a positive sense of well-being, represent important landmarks during their journey to adulthood. As a group, care leavers are more disadvantaged than other young people in achieving these landmarks, although some successfully move on from care whilst others just get by or struggle<sup>1</sup>. It is the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure that all their young people fulfil their potential and this will require comprehensive responses across their life course, including whilst they are in care, at the time of leaving care and on their pathways to adulthood<sup>2</sup>.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES IN CARE

Studies show that good quality placements are central to the present and future wellbeing of young people<sup>3</sup>. These can provide young people with: compensatory attachments to carers, stability and continuity of care; a positive experience of education; assessment and responses to their health and emotional needs, and; preparation in self-care, practical and inter-personal skills. Research suggests some young people with social, emotional and behavioural problems may benefit more treatment based approaches whilst in care<sup>4</sup>.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS FROM CARE

Many care leavers have to cope with major changes in their lives, in leaving foster care or residential care and setting-up home, in leaving school and entering the world of work, or post-16 education or training, or being parents, at a younger age than other young people: they are denied the psychological opportunity to deal with issues over time which is how most young people cope with the challenges of transition. Studies show that those young people who have more gradual, extended and supported transitions from care have better outcomes than those who leave care early<sup>5</sup>.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS TO ADULTHOOD

Most young people today receive practical and emotional support well into adulthood. This highlights the importance of the corporate parenting role 'from care to adulthood', not just at the time of 'leaving care'. Research studies show that young people's main pathways to adulthood – accommodation, careers, health and wellbeing - are closely connected and reinforcing and that they can be assisted by different forms of support including leaving care teams, mentoring, assistance by former carers and positive family and kinship networks<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Accommodation Pathway: corporate parenting and housing providers***

Research shows that leaving care teams are successful in assisting most young people in accessing accommodation at the time of leaving care and in supporting them when they get into difficulties, including homelessness<sup>7</sup>. The main challenges for corporate parents arising from research studies on the accommodation pathway are:

- Providing more opportunities for young people to remain in placements, in particular those young people settled in residential care
- Providing more supportive accommodation, including supported lodgings and semi-supported housing, for young people who leave placements early, including young people not in education, employment and training and those with higher support needs
- Ensuring the support provided by foster, residential and kinship carers, to young people who move on is built into the pathway planning process
- Making use of family group conferences to identify supportive family, kinship and social networks

### ***Careers pathway: corporate parenting, schools, post-16 further and higher education, training and employment***

There is evidence leaving care teams have contributed to the increased participation of young people in further education and work experience, the latter through targeted careers support and employment opportunities (e.g. *From Care2Work* programme)<sup>8</sup>. However, both official data and research has consistently highlighted the 'attainment gap' between looked after children and those in the general population, although many young people make progress from entry to care, when wider criteria are adopted (e.g. school attendance, health and wellbeing), and when outcomes are identified over a longer period of time (more time to catch-up - outcomes generally get better over time<sup>9</sup>). The main challenges for corporate parenting arising from research studies are:

- To maximise the educational and career opportunities of young people through placement stability; early support for catch-up learning; action-oriented Personal Education Plans; individual tutoring to compensate for gaps in schooling; support from family, carers and professionals; financial resources and practical help; sympathetic schools; positive community and cultural influences; clear protocols agreed with colleges and universities, and; staying in placement and being settled in accommodation after 18<sup>10</sup>.
- Providing targeted careers support and enhancing employment opportunities through partnership working, raising aspirations and supporting young people in employment
- The DFE should consider piloting a composite measure of progress ('impact of care'), based on young people pathways from entry to care, to adulthood, as well as using the current normative educational and employment measures.

### ***Health and wellbeing pathway: corporate parenting, CAMHS and adult services***

Research shows that many young people enter care with mental health problems and their physical and mental health problems may increase at the time of leaving care<sup>11</sup>. This is associated with coping with the physical and psychological demands of leaving care early, often combined with earlier pre-care and in care problems. The main challenges for corporate parenting arising from research studies are:

- When young people enter care they should have comprehensive assessments, the provision of stable, high quality placements and, where indicated, treatment interventions
- At the time of leaving care young people will be assisted by more gradual transitions from care, ongoing support by their personal advisers, and access to mental health and psychological services
- Young people may experience problems in moving from child and adolescent mental health services to adult services. However, if they are not in education, employment or training, they are not entitled to support by leaving care services, up to 25 years of age. They may also fail to meet the threshold for adult services. One solution would be for adult services to commission leaving care services to provide this support
- More attention should be given to young people with additional support needs including: the transition of disabled young people to adult services; supporting young parents; care leavers in the youth justice system; working with asylum seeking and trafficked young people, and; responding to the diverse needs of different groups of black and minority ethnic young people

### **CORPORATE PARENTS: IMPROVING THE RANGE AND QUALITY OF SERVICE**

Since the introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, reinforced by the Transitions Guidance, introduced in 2011, the present organisation of leaving care service has resulted in more clearly defined structures, roles and responsibilities and more formalised multi-agency work. However, Government information and research findings, including those based on young people's views, show variations in the range and quality of services<sup>12</sup>. There are some excellent, some good and some very poor services. A major challenge for corporate parenting is how to 'level up' services, especially in the context of 'localism'. NCAS' benchmarking forum could provide the starting point. However, there needs to be an agreed process between central and local government to make this happen – for example, ensuring formal links between 'good' and 'poor services' with similar levels of need (e.g. linking cluster authorities), and developing and reviewing 'action plans' to bring about improvements. This process should also include sharing best practice in relation to specific groups of care leavers, such as some disabled young people, young parents and care leavers in the youth justice system, where there is evidence of service variation.

- <sup>1</sup> Stein, M. (2008) 'Resilience and young people leaving care.' *Child Care in Practice*, 14, 1, 35-44.
- <sup>2</sup> Stein M (2008) *Ibid*
- <sup>3</sup> Sinclair, I., Baker, C., Lee, J. and Gibbs, I. (2007) *The Pursuit of Permanence: A study of the English care system*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- <sup>4</sup> Biehal N et al (2012) *The Care Placements Evaluation (CaPE) Evaluation of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A) Research Brief*, DfE
- <sup>5</sup> Munro R,E, Lushey C, National Care Advisory Service, Debi Maskell-Graham and Ward H with Holmes L (2011), *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot: Final Report*, DfE
- <sup>6</sup> Dixon et al (2006) *Young people leaving care: an evaluation of costs and outcomes*. SPRU, University of York
- <sup>7</sup> Stein, M. and Morris, M. (2010) *Increasing the Numbers of Care Leavers in 'Settled, Safe' Accommodation*. Vulnerable Children Knowledge Review 3. London: C4EO.
- <sup>8</sup> Dixon et al (2006); National Care Advisory Service (2011) *From Care2Work, Phase I Final Report*, London: NCAS
- <sup>9</sup> Stein M and Dumaret A (2011) The mental health of young people aging out of care and entering adulthood: Exploring the evidence from England and France, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33,12.
- <sup>10</sup> Jackson, S et al. (2011) 'England.' In S. Jackson and C. Cameron (eds) *Final Report of the YIPPEE Project, WP12, Young People From a Public Care Background: Pathways to further and higher education in five European countries*. London: Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London
- <sup>11</sup> Dixon, J. (2008) 'Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes.' *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, 2, 207–217.
- <sup>12</sup> Morgan, R. and Lindsay, M. (2012) *Young People's Views on Care and Aftercare*, Office of the Children's Rights Director, London; Ofsted