

Management Matters

A practice guide based on research about
leadership and management in children's homes

For managers and staff teams working in children's
residential care

Leslie Hicks
University of Lincoln
May 2009

Contents

- 1 'Managing children's homes' in context
- 2 Working to develop staff teams
- 3 Working with young people
- 4 Working within the wider organisation
- 5 What influences successful practice?
- 6 Further information

1 Managing children's homes' in context

This Guide has two main aims. First, it is intended to help in raising awareness of the key factors which influence the provision of good quality care in children's homes. Second, it suggests ways to improve working in this important area of practice. The Guide is based on findings from research which focuses on internal management and leadership in children's homes. It is designed to be used by practitioners and managers involved in residential child care.

During the last decade, children's homes in the UK have both responded to and driven the national push to raise standards of care. Much has been achieved in this respect. Relatively recent occupational standards, minimum standards and regulations are all geared towards the formal improvement of the service. During a similar period, a wide range of research has provided considerable insight into various aspects of residential child care. Details of these kinds of information are provided in the 'Further information' section at the end of this Guide.

Building on much of this previous work, the team involved in **the research on which this Guide is based investigated four main aspects which appeared to be influential in the quality of care provided.** These included:

- what the role of manager involves
- the forms of leadership exercised in homes
- the kinds of resources available and the ways these are used
- and the care and outcomes experienced by young people.

The research team examined these areas in terms of **structure, process and outcome**, linking together these guiding concepts in the overall multi-level analysis. More detailed discussions of this are offered elsewhere (Hicks, 2008; Hicks *et. al.*, 2007, 2009).

Focus of the guide. Set within the context of the overall research findings, **this Guide focuses on the qualitative aspects of the research, where**

This Guide is based on findings from national research carried out with statutory and non-statutory children's homes in England. The research was funded originally by the Department of Health as part of the 'Costs and Effectiveness of Services to Children in Need' research Initiative

*Detailed findings from the overall project can be found in the publication **Managing Children's Homes – developing effective leadership in small organisations** Hicks, L., Weatherly, H., Gibbs, I. and Byford, S. (2007) London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.*

*Findings from the overall research initiative 'Costs and Effectiveness of Services for Children in Need', can be found in the publication **Costs and Outcomes in Children's Social Care: Messages from research**, Beecham, J. and Sinclair, I. (2007) London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.*

the *process of managing homes* was highlighted. From extensive analysis of all aspects of the project, this was found to be a vitally important influence in relation to the outcomes experienced by young people. Fundamental to success in this respect was the achievement of shared approaches and expectations within staff teams. The Guide considers the four main areas which were found to be instrumental to this accomplishment:

- working to develop staff teams
- establishing and sustaining work with young people
- sustaining the role of manager within the context of the wider organisation
- influencing successful practice

The Guide indicates some of the implications which these areas have for training and workforce development. Questions designed to aid practice and to prompt discussion are offered throughout the Guide.

2 Working to develop staff teams

A major part of the research focused on here examines how managers and staff establish effective and purposeful working relationships within their teams. This section highlights vital aspects of the task in these respects.

Creating, maintaining and developing a team is an essential part of practice. It has to be capably addressed and at an appropriate pace. A functioning team must be established and maintained in order for staff to be equipped to meet the needs of the young people in their care. This takes time to achieve and does not happen by accident or by 'hoping for the best'. Essentially, establishing and maintaining a team must become a shared and conscious process, apparent to all involved.

Developing and maintaining a team is an ongoing and dynamic activity which must be responsive to changes. Examples of these include changes in: the abilities, experiences and skills of individual team members; team membership itself; the composition of the group of young people; and the experiences and needs of individual young people.

Developing a team requires goal-oriented work. Managers are heavily involved in determining and transmitting the purpose of their homes. Objectives for practice and ways of achieving these have to be clearly formulated by the manager at the earliest possible point in order for staff to be able to share in these and to play a part in realising the purpose of the home. Part of the manager's role includes being able to help individuals to form a co-operating and coherent group.

Children's homes are relationship-based environments whose overall focus lies with the positive development of children and young people, the majority of whom will have experienced complex and disturbing lives. The *quality* of relationships is both a focus for practice and a major component in determining its potential.

Potential combinations of relationships *within* the home are as varied as the number of personnel present. For example, relationships may include those

Changes

What changes have been prominent in your team composition or in team members' experiences in the last month?

Similarly, in the last month, what changes have been prominent in the composition or experiences of the group of young people in your care?

What implications have each of these had /do each of these have for the work that takes place?

Relationships

Starting with the most meaningful relationships you experience in your children's home, list the relationships you play a part in daily.

How would you describe the quality of each relationship? Examples of descriptions might include evaluations (such as 'good', 'indifferent'); intensity ('close'; 'harmonious') frequency ('intermittent', 'constant').

formed between: the staff group and the group of young people; individual members of staff and the group of young people; individual members of staff and individual young people; individual members of staff; and between shift team members.

Each relationship matters, contributes towards overall development and well-being, plays a part in building the nature of the home and has an effect on all those present. Regardless of which people are involved, positive, supportive or happy relationships require a different level of energy to sustain than do more negative, intense or disharmonious relationships.

Energy channelled into sustaining relationships in one direction usually diverts energy away from being able to do the same in other directions. It may be helpful for managers and staff to consider the broader implications of this, in terms of *where, when, how and why* energy is distributed, being directed or claimed at particular points in the history and development of the home. Identifying what takes place in these terms contributes towards a detailed understanding of the dynamics and progress of the home.

A major part of the role of manager consists of assisting staff in their development. This involves coaching, educating and enculturating staff so that they can operate competently and consistently within the expectations and approaches established within the home. Managers have to become familiar with the abilities, skills, experiences and likely responses of staff as part of an ongoing process. Few records exist in this respect and particular levels of knowledge or insight cannot be assumed, not least because a professional or pre-qualification is not a requirement for the staff of children's homes.

Familiarisation with the experience base of staff may be undertaken through both formal and informal means, for example, through supervision, team meetings, taking a break at the same time, observing or modelling practice. Such processes also provide a reciprocal channel for staff – staff members get to know their managers through similar means. Additionally, staff come to know each other in similar ways. These processes enable confidence in capabilities to develop and they provide insight into what might be required and of whom in respect of team maintenance.

Energy

Thinking about the work you have been involved in during the last month, where have you directed the most energy (e.g. to a particular young person or towards several members of staff)?

What are the positive consequences of this?

Similarly, what are the negative consequences?

What kinds of implications might there be for others living or working in the home?

This all helps in the creation of an interdependent environment. Much relies on establishing channels to enable good communication. Managers retain a detailed sense of what takes place daily in their homes – losing sight of this is usually considered by them to be risk-taking practice.

More formal mechanisms which allow managers and staff to keep pace with the home might involve handovers, staff meetings and supervision. Finding appropriate models for each of these is essential to being able to give them proper priority. For example, if supervision repeatedly ‘falls off the end’ in the face of other apparently more pressing priorities it is likely that the way in which this is carried out is not seen as instrumental – and therefore beneficial – to good practice. This would imply that an urgent review of the models in use is necessary. In addition, the more frequently used informal exchanges provide opportunities for on-the-spot advice, coaching and monitoring. These communication mechanisms afford essential opportunities to establish consistency within teams and to provide an overall view of the progress of young people and correspondingly of staff.

Having confidence in the abilities of others is one step towards being able to share roles and responsibilities within the home. A major part of the role of manager involves establishing a balance between the empowerment of staff and retaining decision-making authority. Again, establishing confidence and working towards empowerment has to be part of an ongoing process.

Levels of authority and the ways these are distributed may need to be adjusted alongside consideration of what goes well and what goes not so well. Equilibrium – in this case, the balance in who holds decision-making responsibility – has to be finely tuned. Staff autonomy, rarely given fully by managers, may be afforded as part of a process borne from ‘proving oneself’. Effective managers will continue to prefer most decisions to be ‘run past’ them by staff, or at least confirmed with them at some point close to the relevant event or task.

Collaboration is a crucial aspect here. In order to achieve a well-functioning home, it is important that managers and staff work together to establish a collaborative culture which is fair and which takes account of staff differences. This is created and is sustained by relationships which are interdependent, i.e. which function in relation to each other. The research found that in well-functioning homes, such a culture is led and developed by the manager, who retains the ultimate accountability afforded by their hierarchical position. This kind of collaborative culture is distinct from one which *operates hierarchically*, in a directive manner.

Changes in the staff team represent vital turning points for a staff group. Such changes might involve appointing new staff, or helping longer-serving staff to move to other posts in the interests of their own development. Achieving the 'right mix' of staff is essential. At times there may not be a positive fit between staff team membership and what managers feel is needed to serve the purpose and function of the home. The research describes some of the ways that this occurs, for example, staff frequently may not act in line with the preferred approaches of the home, or individual resistance to change becomes a major obstacle to the progress of the home. In such instances staffing may have to be reviewed. While moving-on staff and bringing others into the team presents challenges for all, achieving this capably represents one of the most important transitions for a staff group. Staff confidence in the manager's capabilities is developed and the manager comes to feel affinity with and a high degree of 'ownership' of their team.

Managers retain a balance between energising staff by having their presence felt within the home and enabling members of staff to feel empowered. At the same time managers have to occupy suitable distance from their teams to protect their own authority, sustain respect and to be able to motivate staff. Managers act to promote buoyancy in the face of negativity and are equipped to suggest alternatives when practice becomes blocked or stuck in some fashion. They adopt a supervisory stance as well as being responsible for checking and monitoring. To do this continuously and effectively managers have to spend sufficient time within their homes to keep pace with them, to understand how to influence progress and to achieve it.

**Getting to
know each
other**

*How do you
become familiar
with the skills
and abilities of
team members?*

*What formal
processes are in
use?*

*What informal
processes are
preferred in
your home?*

*Do any changes
need to be made
here?*

*If so, what
improvements
need to be made
and by whom?*

*How will you
bring these
about?*

The nature of the manager’s post has an important influence on what can be achieved in all these respects. The ways managers come into post, whether or not these are temporary or permanent appointments, changes in the purpose or function of homes and uncertainty about aspects of the home or the post all contribute to establishing the boundaries for and approaches to practice and its potential overall. Much of a manager’s initial approach depends on the nature of their appointment into post and the extent of their resulting authority and confidence. Managers see their initial experiences as having a lasting effect on the ways that they are able to shape the potential for practice in their homes.

The tasks of managers draw on a complex set of skills which go beyond those which are more generally described as ‘management tasks’. The elements of these contribute to the way in which leadership is established and sustained, or ‘held’, within children’s homes. The elements combine educative functions – expertise in communication, engagement, relationship dynamics, human development and role modelling – with routine management tasks, as well as a more strategic overall vision in relation to where the home is heading within the wider organisational context. The research shows that an accumulation of strengths in these areas makes a vital contribution towards attaining good outcomes for young people. An obvious but important point to make – and which will be considered later in the Guide – is that all of these areas will be influenced by factors determined at the level of the wider organisation.

3 Working with young people

From the *process* part of the research it is clear that **the positive approaches described by managers in relation to their staff teams were often intended to translate into preferred ways of practicing with young people** – for example, taking account of differences, being seen to be fair, using collaborative approaches. This section describes the ways that managers and staff alike bring about such approaches in direct, day-to-day work.

Although not always within the control of every manager of children's homes, the research shows that **obtaining the 'right mix' of young people is a priority** in this respect. National Minimum Standards for children's homes (2002) require that young people admitted to the home will 'fit' with the resident group, the capacities of members of staff and the avowed purpose and function of the unit. Managers prefer this. However, for operational reasons, including the current level of development of commissioning for the residential sector, the matching of needs and placements is not possible to meet at all times. Working with problematic dynamics will routinely form part of practice in children's homes. This is part of the residential task.

Approaches to working with young people rely on establishing a manner which is consistent across the *group* of staff and young people. At the same time, such approaches must be able to respect and focus on *individual* needs. All young people living in children's homes have experienced difficulties in their lives. This, in combination with the complexities associated with being looked after, means that there will be high levels of need present, both of individual young people and of the group. **Balancing individual and group needs** involves important factors such as parity, fairness, negotiation and matching of resources. Some methods of working clearly focus on individuals, for example key-worker systems. All methods are responsive to shifts in the dynamics of the home.

As with the staff group, **getting to know and to understand young people's needs and characteristics is the most likely starting point for practice** and this is of priority on admission to the home. Once a placement had been made, part of identifying needs involves assessing risk areas and reducing the likelihood of opportunities for these to occur. **Identifying the 'state' of each young person on**

entry to the home offers a starting point for relationship-forming and for establishing familiarity, routines and boundaries for behaviour.

Converting care plans into placement plans is crucial for young people's development. Being confident in terms of understanding the wider picture relating to expectations for behaviour offers a foundation for determining individualised care. Again, judging the appropriate pace for bringing this about is an important element of good practice.

Clearly, adhering to procedures and guidelines is vital. Enabling staff to be confident that they understand statutory and organisational expectations in terms of young people's behaviour provides a firm foundation for practice. Though not sufficient in itself, written information of some sort for staff, such as induction packs, training manuals and checklists provide useful aids to this understanding. Some organisations emphasise the value of giving written guidance to young people in relation to expectations for ways of behaving and this often complements the material provided for staff.

The terms '**establishing boundaries**' and '**testing boundaries**' are often encountered in practice with young people. Boundaries may be seen as forming part of a structure, enabling a sense of both security in young people and of direction for staff. It is particularly important in children's homes to establish agreement and clarity in relation to which boundaries are thought to be 'negotiable' and which are thought to be 'non-negotiable'. 'Establishing boundaries' might mean the use of clear, rigid rules on the one hand, or on the other it might refer to action taken to impose order as a result of a young person behaving in a variety of ways which cause increasing levels of concern. Either usage of the term implies ways of managing behaviour, or controlling it. Practice will vary according to influences from staff, the wider organisation/ department as well as the kinds of influence exerted by the manager of the home.

It is not unusual for children's homes to experience consistently high levels of complex and demanding work over time, particularly in respect

**Getting to know
young people**

*When young
people are
admitted to the
home, what
formal ways of
identifying their
needs are in use?*

*What informal
processes are in
use in your home?*

*What channels of
communication
are in existence in
relation to the
above?*

*Do any changes
related to these
areas need to be
made?*

*If so, what
improvements
need to be made
and by whom?*

*How will you
bring these
about?*

of the behaviours of young people. While managers may regard this as the essence of residential child care, it is often the case that staff may need to be convinced of this. Often staff will consider demanding or extreme behaviours in terms of their personal effect, as distinct from them being a major element of the professional task. Many staff members are likely to draw initially on their direct or indirect familial experiences of young people's behaviour and from there may determine what constitutes 'reasonable' or 'acceptable' behaviour. In such situations, **part of the role of manager entails working with staff to assist them in finding ways of addressing the complex demand presented.** For example, this may include learning to develop empathic responses as a prior condition for establishing expectations for behaviour, and thereby setting appropriate boundaries in the home.

Successful managers collaborate with their staff in respect of **establishing boundaries and routines for young people.** These take account of individuals as well as the group, using sanction and reward processes where deemed appropriate.

Reward systems are used in various ways in children's homes and are not without contention. Sometimes managers initiate these systems through choice and sometimes they find themselves inheriting formal 'token economies'. These may have historic foundations in social learning theory, although the relevance of this to current circumstance and practice may at best be held very loosely. Where educational provision is integral to care provision it may be the case that reward systems are well-established in the classroom and that behaviour becomes largely managed through practices determined in the educational setting.

It is important to monitor the use of sanction and reward. Many residential staff are committed to the benefits of sanctions in terms of providing a clear approach to discriminating between different forms of behaviour and their acceptability. The research found an increased use of sanctions to be frequently in operation as a response by staff who lacked confidence. Early recourse to sanctions is likely to be counterproductive to the successful longer-term management of behaviour. The operation of systems of reward are not straightforward to maintain; managers often find themselves monitoring practice in this respect, mediating between staff, or overturning staff decisions. **Achieving staff consistency in response to the behaviour of young people is an ongoing and complex task which requires a**

clear view of practice overall within the home. This merits high levels of input from the manager.

Identifying ways of remaining in touch with the pace of development of both young people and staff is crucial. This enables planning to take place, co-ordination of work and the communication of what is needed at any given time for each young person. This is not achieved simply. Consistency is vital. It is important that staff are able to recognise when flexibility is needed and which areas of everyday life are suitable for negotiation. Working from within an overtly recognised regulatory framework, **managers retain sight of a balance between longer term goals for young people and the appropriate pace for each child.**

Establishing boundaries and routines is practiced within a changing context, essentially fluid and reactive to shifts in circumstance. Expectations have to be set in relation to individual needs from within a group setting. Judgements are required in order to set priorities such as giving preference to consistency rather than to individual needs and *vice versa*. Managers have to render transparent and tangible their rationale for decision-making in relation to the preferred approaches used. In principle this is as relevant for work with staff as it is for work with young people. There are likely to be degrees of variation, methods and discretion in operation, according to the prevailing situation in the home.

Knowing acceptable ways to proceed and behave on the part of staff helps to develop security. It forms part of building an understanding relationship with each young person. **Relationship-building is usually viewed as the primary residential task. It remains one of the most crucial and complex areas of practice.** Success in this respect is best achieved as part of a thought-out but unforced approach. Building relationships with young people takes time, skill, insight and patience to bring about. Critical reflection on the part of staff is an important aspect of the process.

WORKING WITH
YOUNG
PEOPLE'S
BEHAVIOUR

Boundaries

How would you describe the kinds of boundaries in place for young people living in your home?

How are boundaries set in your home?

Are some boundaries seen as negotiable?

Are some seen as 'non-negotiable'?

Do all staff agree on these areas?

If not, what are the likely consequences of this, for staff and for young people?

Are there improvements which need to be made in these respects?

If so, what are these and how will you bring these about?

PLEASE
FOLLOW THE
ABOVE
QUESTION
FORMAT IN
RESPECT OF
OTHER AREAS
OF PRACTICE IN
RELATION TO
BEHAVIOUR, e.g.
sanctions,
rewards, pocket
money, bedtimes.

Key-workers or link-workers are vital to developing successful relationships with young people. The research has much to say about these roles. They allow the identification of an individual worker who will prioritise the interests of particular young people within the home and who will act reliably as their representative outside the home. This contributes to continuity and the potential progress of young people. Opportunities for providing this form of one-to-one support frequently have to be balanced against demands from the resident group.

Working externally and enabling others to do this forms part of the manager's role and high levels of input may be required of – and are largely preferred by – managers. In most situations, working with other professionals may depend heavily on the efforts of residential staff, both in bringing about the work and sustaining it. **Enabling staff to operate confidently within external professional networks, such as with schools, health services, field social workers, as well as with families and carers requires detailed attention from managers.** They are usually involved at the start point with any external relationship and regard maintaining that relationship to be part of their own task. This forms part of managers' work 'across the boundary of the home', as advocate for – and representative of – the home. This work usually is welcomed by managers as it offers greater control over co-ordinating services and is seen to play a part in maintaining appropriately 'permeable boundaries' (i.e. where external influences are absorbed and serve to enhance internal operation but do not swamp it) around the home.

The research found that while **contact with field social workers is essential** throughout the placement, managers hold varying degrees of freedom in relation to the frequency and nature of this. Managers and staff often tend to work with field social workers on a courteous basis, sharing information about young peoples' progress as a routine matter, using field social workers as conduits and reference points. Many managers consider that staff within the home are able and are perhaps better equipped to carry out more focused work with young people than are field social workers. An example of this might be seen in family re-unification work. The degree of accountability to field social workers often varies between statutory and non-statutory sectors and this is influenced by the commissioning role. Where allocated social workers are not available, the

potential impact on practice is high, as accountability may be jeopardised and progress on behalf of a young person may be limited. Managers are heavily involved in assisting staff to feel secure in their understanding of the nature of their relationships with field social workers.

Developing and maintaining relationships with schools and colleges

is a further vital aspect of managers' work. While many effective relationships exist, most homes in this research found that sustaining attendance at school for particular young people presents difficulties in some fashion. This applies to all types of children's homes, since homes with access to their own educational provision also aspire to attain mainstream education for their resident young people, where possible and appropriate. A range of reasons leads to difficulties, from the level of the individual young person (e.g. motivation), at the school level (e.g. school willingness to engage or provide support) and at bureaucratic levels (e.g. financial agreements in respect of transport). Both formal and informal approaches to difficulties are used by managers and their staff and these vary in their successfulness. It is important to note that in this research responsibility for resolving young people's educational difficulties in general is perceived to lie with children's homes as distinct from educationalists. Experience shows managers and staff that they might anticipate lengthy negotiation with schools and may have to provide extensive support for young people, often within the school itself. For example, this might mean providing help with managing a young person's behaviour in the classroom. Helping school and residential staff to work together constructively with young people is a pivotal task for managers, requiring strong communication skills.

Managers are crucial reference points for young people; they also function as role models for working directly with young people while being advocates for them and for the home itself. The research examines the ways in which managers are involved in determining and providing direction for working with young people. Managers work to establish and communicate the preferred rationale for decision-making in relation to the approaches to working with young people. Arriving at a

YOUNG PEOPLE AND EXTERNAL NETWORKS

What are the main networks outside the home with which you work regularly on behalf of young people? Examples might include schools, colleges, health services.

How would you describe working relationships in each of these arenas?

What are the consequences of the above?

What enables strong relationships to be established and maintained with each network which you have identified?

What contributes to relationships not working so well?

Are there changes you can identify which need to be made here?

If so, by whom, in what ways and what are your next steps?

consensus – a considered and identifiable approach – among staff in respect of this is shown to be vital. It allows consistency and an ensuing sense of security for all concerned.

Collaboration with staff allows strategies to be formulated which are both agreed and felt to be achievable practically. Strategies allow confidence in ‘what to do next’ when new situations emerge. Again, the research indicates that strengths in these areas contribute towards the kinds of outcomes which young people experience. Enabling agreed and achievable strategies in a home in relation to both behaviour and education bears importantly on outcomes for young people.

4 Working within the wider organisation

The *process* part of the research explored the self-management skills and supports which managers of children's homes felt to need in order to do perform their tasks well. This section describes and considers these aspects of the role in relation to wider organisational structures.

The arenas of work discussed so far rely on **managers drawing on high levels of resilience, together with strong coping mechanisms.** It comes as no surprise to find that managers embody many of the attributes which they hope to draw out of their staff members and from the young people in their care. Involved here are personal characteristics, qualities and commitment to particular values, involving aspects such as confidence, trust, autonomy, clarity, fairness and openness. Managers find that they must operate as confident practitioners, supervisors and responsible figures who are worthy of trust. This all serves to render them capable of practicing autonomously in a clearly defined, goal-oriented manner. It is clear that managers have the potential to attain high levels of influence over their staff teams and the young people in their care. **In order to develop their own performance in a confident manner, managers must establish credibility within their own organisations.**

Managers need to feel that they have sufficient control over their own homes to practice flexibly and with an appropriate degree of autonomy. This assists with building a sense of purpose in the role and therefore helps to sustain motivation. While managers give a high value to autonomy, they do not assume that this is theirs by right, preferring to regard it as an exchange between themselves as individuals and their parent organisations.

This empowered relationship is seen to develop over time and is part of an ongoing process. Much depends on experience, which allows reputation and respect to develop. 'Fitting in' with the organisation, being regarded as obliging and dependable – and usually being liked – by senior managers are all elements which managers regard as essential to 'proving'

THE WIDER ORGANISATION

Question for managers

Where does your home sit in terms of the wider organisation? Responses might relate to numbers, size, purpose or other factors.

What channels of communication exist for managers of homes in your area?

Do you meet with managers from other homes in the locality, or regionally, regularly?

If so, for what purposes?

How would you describe the level of autonomy which you have in your role?

What are the implications of this and for whom?

their individual merit. Achieving a means of effective communication throughout the organisational hierarchy gives further space for maintaining these aspects.

The ways in which organisations are structured influences the degrees of autonomy experienced by managers. For example, while some organisations devolve responsibility to managers, others operate in a more fragmented manner, sharing roles across management tiers. Sometimes the brief given to a manager will mean that high levels of autonomy are associated with particularly high levels of responsibility, for example where a manager appointed as temporary is assigned to the home in order to redeem it. In such circumstances particularly high levels of confidence are required on the part of the manager:

At times the balance is tipped between autonomy – where active ownership of the task is present – and unsupported isolation. In such cases, managers find themselves in the position of having to take responsibility for engaging their line-managers, usually by sensitive and diplomatic means, to prevent further marginalisation. Any difficulties in communicating with line managers are largely regarded by managers as situations where they have to act to initiate action to resolve. The form and meaning of the relationship with line-managers is in general seen to lie with managers of homes to influence. Energies are routinely exerted in this direction.

Resources for staffing are usually determined externally to the home. Where degrees of freedom exist, these are set at organisational level, with permission being needed to extend beyond the declared limits. Exceptional circumstances, such as some form of crisis, may mean that managers are given greater freedom of operation in this respect. At times, additional hours are worked by staff and the issue of taking accrued time off in lieu becomes a concern and ultimately a major stressor which may promote levels of disharmony among the team. In situations where no fair agreement is reached, staff may perceive no alternative to taking sick leave in order to alleviate strain. At worst, this level of spiralling may be seen by line-managers as evidence of poor functioning, particularly if pre-existing practice and outcomes are not felt to be positive.

Support from line-managers varies in its form and frequency. Many factors influence variation in this respect, including the status of the manager within the organisation (this includes both formal and informal status), the 'climate' and history of the home itself, the extent to which managers prefer to be supported/ draw upon support, and perceptions of the line-manager's approach to their job. Homes are overseen frequently by line-managers; this often takes the form of group meetings established to discuss general progress. Managers most usually prefer contact with external managers to be established on an 'as and when necessary' basis, being considered most legitimately requested in times of crisis. The research underpinning this Guide shows that while many managers experience high levels of willingness to offer support, at times the capacity to provide it is experienced as somewhat lacking. Achieving a satisfactory balance in flexible situations of this nature is not without difficulties. While managers clearly see it as important not to be left alone with a situation where advice and support is thought to be necessary, they also prefer not to use line-management support as a first resort. Managers prefer to rely on their own resources.

Approaches to supervision – how it is delivered and what it entails – vary considerably. The research indicates that detailed supervision and support for personal development is often seen as a matter for individual negotiation. While some managers take pride in *not* being actively supervised, other managers feel that some form of supervision is essential to their practice. Again, managers tend to determine their own needs in respect of supervision and regard it as their responsibility to bring about a suitable supervisory relationship with their line-manager. At times, the managers participating in this study experienced supervision as a negative event, for example a one-sided opportunity for the line-manager to give views on performance. Where trusting and respectful relationships exist between residential managers and their external managers, supervision in any form is usually seen as valuable.

Supervision often focuses on practice in some fashion, as distinct from personal development. For example, this might mean that the line-

SUPERVISION

Questions for managers

What kinds of support do you prefer from your line-manager?

What kinds of supervision help you to work well?

Are there any changes you would like to see in these respects?

If so, how might these be brought about and by whom?

What are your likely next steps?

manager provides confirmation of an approach with a young person, acts to provide reassurance or as a sounding board in relation to progress, or is drawn on to act as advocate in external arenas. **Support for managers from groups of peers and individual colleagues from other arms of provision** within the wider organisation offers a valued source of advice and/or encouragement. Other forms of support may come from individuals such as other professionals, family members or friends.

Being in contact directly with senior managers enables a sense of security within the wider organisation. Forming relationships within the senior hierarchy is seen to be vital. Integration into the wider organisation helps to secure engagement within the service overall and to shape managers' sense of progress. Becoming involved at this level provides opportunities for managers to feel valued by senior managers, sometimes serves to outweigh perceived injustices, helps in building a creditable reputation and frequently assists in sustaining the motivation of individual managers.

Strategic work within the organisation – such as contributing to aspects of policy, procedure and/or planning – is often seen to present a double-edged challenge. While requiring additional motivation, energy and time which managers often feel ill-equipped to afford, commitment to such work may be both stimulating and, in the long term, beneficial to the manager and to the home, as well as to the service in general. Much depends on the skills of the manager and the demands being presented by the home itself.

High proportions of time spent in the home are usually considered by managers to be essential. Managers prefer to know and understand what work is taking place and how it is occurring. Time in itself is not sufficient. Actually playing a part in practice, or being able to observe it, is a vital and irreplaceable part of the manager's task. Oral or written communication about what is taking place supports, rather than substitutes for, the manager's direct assessments of interpersonal relationships and practice. Overall, the amount of time managers are able to spend within their homes will vary according to the climate of the home, the formal or informal status of the manager within the

wider organisation, organisational expectations and requirements, and the individual needs of the manager.

Few development opportunities which retain the core task of residential child care are felt to exist for managers of children's homes. Despite this, managers need to find opportunities for stimulation and development. Routes to these energisers will differ, for example they may include extending the type of work which the home offers, developing managers' own skills, or taking on additional responsibilities. Interests external to the home and within the wider organisation provide an important means of retaining buoyancy and stimulation. Although this adds to workloads, there are distinct benefits in terms of broadening the networks related to the home and keeping up-to-date with concerns beyond the boundary of the home.

Feeling valued by the parent organisation is an important key to success, since managers need to feel that they are being treated fairly and with a respect equal to that shown to their peers. Managers need sufficient freedom to operate while feeling that they are not left on their own with difficulties. They work to achieve accessible and trustworthy support systems which they can make use of effectively, knowing when and how to draw on them. They must be confident and clear in their approach with their own organisations and be willing to participate in wider organisational networks, functioning strategically where necessary. Concurrently managers must spend sufficient time working in their homes to retain close contact and to influence the way they function. An accumulation of good practice in all of these areas will combine to influence the overall functioning of the home.

MOTIVATION AND ENERGY

Questions for managers

*What helps you
to retain
motivation and
energy in your
post?*

*What prevents
this?*

*Are there
changes which
might be made
in this respect?*

*If so, by whom
and in what
ways?*

*What are your
likely next steps?*

5 What influences successful practice?

The research as a whole provides detailed analyses of the main aspects of managing children's homes. This allows an examination of the elements which contribute to being able to perform the role of manager well. Statistical analyses enable further insight in respect of the relationship which this process has to costs and to the outcomes experienced by young people. Detailed accounts of these analyses can be found elsewhere (Hicks, 2008; Hicks *et. al.*, 2007, 2009). **Ways of working with staff teams, with young people and with the wider organisation are important levels of functioning which, in combination, contribute towards the overall approach to leadership in children's homes.** The research shows that the accumulation of strengths in these different arenas acts as an overall enabler of good practice.

The research highlights the key factors which have a positive influence on practice. These are set within a conceptualisation of leadership and management in children's homes. The chief factors include:

- ✓ **the developmental nature of the manager's role in relation to the staff group**
- ✓ **the inter-relationship between what occurs in the home itself and what occurs in the external context**
- ✓ **the way the manager's role is exercised**

The research indicates the importance of the manager's influence in relation to the internal and external contexts in which they operate. Arenas which function *interdependently* include individual managers' approaches within the home, with the staff group, with the group of young people, together with approaches in contextual arenas such as the organisation, other agencies and more widely in terms of policy and procedures. **In order to work effectively, managers need to be well placed within each of these arenas if they are to offer and to enable consistent and reflective practice for and on behalf of the young people living in the care of the home itself.**

Each of the above elements has implications for children's homes in terms of theories of leadership and leadership development. Although the ever-expanding theoretical

literature focusing on leadership provides useful insights, its application to children's homes is not a simple matter. Existing management and leadership literature has not been developed from within the context of children's homes. The research on which this Guide is based (Hicks *et. al.*, 2007), together with the NCERCC suite of documents (of which this is one part, alongside leadership, teamwork and group work documents) offer new insight into these areas.

In general, leadership literature focuses on contexts which are often clearly delineated, large, hierarchical organisations which are standard- and goal-oriented, where performance can be identified and measured. While many of these characteristics are possible to discern in smaller organisations, children's homes occupy a distinctive place in terms of their purposes. They are formed around establishing and developing caring relationships for individual children and young people within a group setting. Although it is possible to measure some aspects of the work which takes place, the work of children's homes is not centred upon quantifiable products. Work is often fast-paced, interrupted and immediate – it is not always possible to wait for the 'right' person to be present. As has been shown, authoritative work is not solely a matter for the manager; staff need to know the way things are expected to be done and by whom, in their particular home. Staff need to be able to practice independently and confidently. The research allows an examination of the process of forming and distributing leadership within these small, development and relationship focused organisations.

A major finding from the research as a whole is that of primary importance is achieving a collaborative team dynamic which works consistently over time, and within the manager's preferred approach to practice. This is essential to establishing consistency in ways of working with young people.

Drawing on all stages of the research, the overall analysis showed that:

“In homes where the manager had clear, well-worked out strategies for dealing with behaviour and education, staff had higher morale, felt that they received clearer and better guidance, and felt that the young people behaved better. Young people were less likely to be excluded from school and were

less likely to be convicted or cautioned while in the home. They also expressed more favourable views about the social climate of the home, were happier on some measures, and were seen as functioning better by their field social workers.” (Hicks et. al., 2007: 187)

The research found that effective managers achieve a working consensus, where goals are shared among the staff team and staff are equally motivated. For the majority of staff, this form of sharing and equality of contribution are seen to be part of their overall value base and commitment. The extent to which managers are able to bring about a collaborative approach relies on several factors, not least the balance they prefer or are able to achieve between holding formal and informal responsibility themselves and actively empowering staff. Work towards such collaborative conditions for practice takes time to bring about. Factors outside the immediate control of – or pre-dating in some way – the individual manager may serve to prevent collaboration, for example, the ways in which agency staff are utilised.

Attaining the balance between empowerment and retaining informal and formal responsibility for oneself as manager is a complex process involving a range of factors internal to the team. Examples of these factors involve differences in key areas: the motivation and contribution within the staff team or between the manager and the majority of the staff team; the team’s acceptance of the manager; establishing shared goals; collaboration and co-ordinated practice. Sharing responsibilities beyond a superficial level throughout the staff team is dependent on the extent to which empowerment is possible. This, in turn, depends upon the extent to which managers feel to be assured of unity in skills, approaches and goals.

The role of manager involves and is sustained by many factors other than the manager’s position within the hierarchical structure – what might be termed ‘positional power’. The quality of the culture of the organisation together with the kinds of leadership which is held are major elements which contribute towards the successful execution of the role. For example, there may be organisational structures or cultures which determine or constrain managers’ leadership styles. The specific role of manager is sustained at both the level of the individual and that of the parent

organisation and these factors, together with those which influence the degrees of autonomy afforded to managers, are important keys to success.

The research gives a detailed portrait of the ways that success in children's homes depends upon a complex balance between informal and formal processes. These are considered in other documents in the NCERCC 'leadership and management' suite. The overall research analysis shows that the more expensive homes are no more successful in achieving good outcomes than the less expensive. The project demonstrates the importance of the *nature* of practice.

A major finding of this research is that managers and staff working in children's homes with clear strategies for achieving appropriate behaviour and education are usually those where leadership is formed from within collaborative cultures. Without such a foundation, the systems, guidance, procedures and targets which are brought to bear on residential child care are unlikely to be sufficient. The central concern is to establish a set of shared expectations and approaches. This is more easily done in a small, well-led establishment with a cohesive staff group.

A major challenge lies in increasing awareness of the importance of supporting these endeavours. Line-management tiers, parent organisations and national commitment all need to regard this as a matter for shared concern. An immediately apparent source of support would appear to fall within the realms of training. Training for residential staff has undergone many changes in emphasis over recent years and many questions remain about the nature of training appropriate to enabling an improvement in the standard of residential child care. At the time of writing (2009), an important note of optimism can be made in this regard. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) developments for a Social Care Professional Development Framework involve Professional Standards for Residential Child Care Workers, with consideration of how these might be taken forwards into qualifications.

There is little research which focuses on the forms, standards and merits of training existing for managers and staff working in children's homes. This means that there are gaps to fill. Greater understanding needs to be established about the balance

between attaining informative and detailed training and prescriptions about practice. Do these latter stifle the potential for cultural growth?

Team work and team dynamics clearly are important in children's homes, which indicates that certain forms of training will need to take account of the setting itself. This implies that training will need to be home and group oriented, with a particular focus on the individual context of the home and its purpose.

Bearing in mind the arenas emphasised throughout this guide, a key question remains which all concerned must consider: what might helpful training entail and how might it be delivered to maximise its benefits?

6 Further information

Findings from the research study on which this Guide is based can be found in the following publications:

Hicks, L., (2008) 'The role of manager in children's homes: the process of managing and leading a well-functioning staff team' *Child and Family Social Work*, 13, 3, 241-251.

Hicks, L., Gibbs, I., Weatherly, H. and Byford, S. (2009) 'Management, leadership and resources in children's homes: what influences outcomes in residential child-care settings?' *British Journal of Social Work*, 39, 5:828-845

Hicks, L., Gibbs, I., Weatherly, H. and Byford, S. (2007) *Managing Children's Homes: Developing Effective Leadership in Small Organisations*, London: Jessica Kingsley

The overview of the research initiative of which this research was a part is published as:

Beecham, J. and Sinclair, I. (2007) *Costs and Outcomes in Children's Social Care: Messages from research*, Costs and Effectiveness of Services for Children in Need, London: Jessica Kingsley. Available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/childreninneed/costsandoutcomes/>

Selected publications about residential child care which may be of interest are:

Department of Health (1998) *Caring for Children Away From Home: messages from research*, Chichester: John Wiley

Hicks, L., Archer, L. and Whitaker, D. (1998) 'The prevailing cultures and staff dynamics in children's homes: the relevance for training', *Social Work Education*, 17, 3: 361-373

Hicks, L. and Sinclair, I. (2009) 'Residential Care for Social Reasons' in M. Gelder, N. Andreasen, J. Lopez-Ibor and J. Geddes (eds) *New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry*, Oxford University Press

Sinclair, I. and Gibbs, I. (1998) *Children's Homes a study of diversity*. Chichester: John Wiley.

Whitaker, D., Archer, L., and Hicks, L. (1998) *Working in Children's Homes: Challenges and Complexities*, Chichester: Wiley

Each of the above contains useful reference lists for those who are interested in reading more about empirical research in this area.

Additional reference:

Department of Health (2002) *Children's Homes: National Minimum Standards – Children's Homes Regulations*, London, The Stationery Office