

Rethinking place and the social work office in the delivery of children's social work services

Nicky Stanley BA MA MSc¹, Cath Larkins BSc MSc PhD¹, Helen Austerberry BSc², Nicola Farrelly BA MA¹, Jill Manthorpe BA MA³ and Julie Ridley BA PhD¹

¹School of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK, ²Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, London, UK and ³Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London, London, UK

Accepted for publication 14 November 2014

Correspondence

Professor Nicky Stanley
School of Social Work
University of Central Lancashire
Preston PR1 2HE, UK
E-mail: nstanley@uclan.ac.uk

What is known about this topic

- Although place is known to influence how public services operate and are used, there is little research into the concept of place in relation to children's social work.
- Place shapes the dynamics of children's and families' relationships with professionals.
- An emphasis on children's participation has encouraged opportunities for children to influence their physical environment.

What this paper adds

- Some social work practices succeeded in making their offices accessible and welcoming to children and families.
- In social work, place encompasses professionals' interactions with service users as well as the physical environment.
- Attention to place can combat the stigma that is evoked by out-of-home care and confer value on staff and service users.

Introduction

In rethinking the delivery of children's social work, little attention has been given to the spaces in which welfare services for children and families are located.

Abstract

Limited attention has been given to the concept of place in social work research and practice. This paper draws on the national evaluation of social work practices (SWPs) in England undertaken between 2009 and 2012. SWPs were pilot organisations providing independent social work services for children in out-of-home care in five sites. One factor distinguishing some of these pilots was their attention to place. The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach and we use data from interviews with 121 children and young people in out-of-home care, 19 birth parents and 31 interviews with SWP staff which explored their views and experiences of the SWP offices. Children and young people were alert to the stigma which could attach to social work premises and appreciated offices which were planned and furnished to appear less institutional and more 'normal'. Daily interactions with staff which conveyed a sense of recognition and value to service users also contributed to a view of some SWP offices as accessible and welcoming places. Both children and parents appreciated offices that provided fun activities that positioned them as active rather than passive. Staff valued opportunities for influencing planning decisions about offices and place was seen to confer a value on them as well as on service users. However, not all the SWPs were able to achieve these aspects of place, and engaging children and families in place was less likely when the service user population was widely dispersed. Recognising the importance of place and how place is constructed through relationships between people as well as through the physical environment appeared to be key to creating offices that combated the stigma attached to out-of-home care. Those leading and managing children's services should explore ways of involving local communities in planning social work offices and turn attention to making these offices accessible, welcoming, places.

Keywords: place, social work practices, out-of-home care, space, social work offices

Yet the environment and location of social work services are relevant both for staff and for those who receive services, shaping service perceptions and perceptions of self as well as impacting on communication and relationships between practitioners and

children and families. This paper draws on findings from the national evaluation of social work practices (SWPs), a government pilot which ran between 2009 and 2012 in five sites in England that aimed to test the value of independent social work organisations for delivering consistent support to children in out-of-home care and their families. One distinguishing aspect of the work of the SWPs was an emphasis on the place in which professionals were situated and services delivered to children and families, and it is this aspect of their work that is examined here.

Space and place have long been recognised as key to the way in which public services function and are experienced. The location and design of large institutions such as hospitals, prisons, schools and homes for older people have attracted public attention and investment, reflecting the social value attributed to their function and clients (see Wiles 2005). Architectural competition has sought to maximise accessibility and utility, as well as meeting aesthetic interests and conveying a particular image of such services. More recently, there has been an emphasis on engaging local communities, staff and users of such buildings in the design from the early planning stages: children, parents and teachers were, for instance, consulted in the recent Building Schools for the Future programme in England and Wales (Rudd 2008).

The aim of promoting user participation has boosted an emerging interest in place in social care, and social work practice and research have explored ways in which children and young people can exert influence over the physical environment in which services are delivered. Such approaches emphasise children's expertise and agency (Clark & Percy-Smith 2006) and their influence can be traced in the explicit commitment to children's and young people's participation in the development and governance of the SWPs. In their fullest expression, such theories can involve rethinking ownership of public services and reconceptualising places such as residential children's homes (Stevens 2006) as 'children's spaces' which Moss and Petrie (2002) describe as co-created between adults and children. However, while arguments for a restructuring of the relationships between children and professionals are welcome, Mannion (2007) notes that use of the term 'children's spaces' can obscure the way in which children's participation is mediated by adults.

In exploring children's, families' and social workers' experiences and perceptions of social work offices, we define place as 'locations imbued with meaning that are sites of everyday practice' (Cresswell 2009, p. 178). Cresswell specifies place as constituting location, locale and a sense of place:

Location refers to the 'where' of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks ... Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes. (Cresswell 2009, p. 169)

We therefore consider both physical sites and how these are composed as well as considering the human feelings and interactions within these sites which give them meaning. In exploring elements of location and locale, we examine perceptions of the social work offices' physical location and of their décor and furnishings. In respect of a sense of place, we consider expressions of feeling about and the practices which occur within the space of social work offices.

Although understandings of place are well developed in health geography (e.g. Andrews 2002, Andrews & Shaw 2008), interest in place and social work services is a recent development. Ferguson's (2008, 2010, 2011) work has provided stimulation for other research in this area. He examines the way in which the environment shapes the dynamics of practitioners' relationships with children and families and notes that 'the organisations that parents and children step into are not neutral spaces' (Ferguson 2011, p. 125). Jeyasingham (2014a) builds on Ferguson's (2008, 2010) work to analyse accounts of social workers' movements across different territories and boundaries in their daily work. Holland's (2014) account of safeguarding in one community in South Wales emphasises how place shapes practice and perceptions of safeguarding children and suggests that local social networks could be harnessed to enhance lives.

In his exploration of the significance of place in children's development and attachments, Jack (2010, p. 757) defines place as what 'comes into existence when people give meaning to a part of the larger, undifferentiated space in which they live'. For those children and young people in out-of-home care whose lives are characterised by change and disruption, the social work office can be a place where key decisions about their lives are made and communicated, and where important relationships with both their birth parents and their social workers are shaped. The office or building may be a recurrent place in their lives, potentially offering continuity when social workers or foster homes change. It may also embody their identity as children in the care of the state (Jack 2010).

The rise of managerialism has been accompanied by the introduction of new technology into the social care workplace, and its effects on work patterns and social work practice have been identified by both researchers (Broadhurst *et al.* 2010) and practitioners. Jeyasingham (2014b) has examined the impact of

'agile working' together with the size and design of office space on social workers' practice and communication. The physical and geographical specifics of the workplace contribute to staff satisfaction and well-being, and these factors themselves have a knock-on effect on service users' experience of a service. In their focus on place, the SWP pilots were responding to these emerging ideas and attempting both to create new forms of social work organisations characterised by a sense of staff ownership and to influence the relationships between staff and the children and families who used their services.

The SWP model was first mooted in a Green Paper (DfES 2006) that envisaged these organisations as similar to GP (General Practitioner – family doctors) practices. The blueprint for the SWP pilots was provided in a subsequent working party report (Le Grand 2007) which identified three possible models: (i) the professional partnership owned and run by practitioners which might be for-profit or not-for-profit; (ii) the voluntary not-for-profit or third sector model; and (iii) the private sector SWP. The five SWP pilots were established in England in 2010 as independent social work organisations contracted by local authorities to provide social work services to children in out-of-home care and care leavers (for full details, see Stanley *et al.* 2012). The pilots differed considerably from one another in the organisational model adopted, their size and the groups of children in their care, and the extent to which they were able to provide accessible and attractive premises also varied. However, as all the pilots aimed to give attention to the issue of place, this topic was addressed by the national evaluation and in this paper, we draw on this aspect of the research to explore the meanings conveyed by and attributed to the environment of the social work office.

Methods

The authors conducted an independent evaluation of the SWP pilots between 2009 and 2012. The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach (Jowell 2003) collecting both qualitative data through interviews with children, parents, staff, managers, commissioners and other professionals and administering two large-scale surveys of children's services staff and foster carers. A full account of the methodology and the findings regarding the overall performance of the SWPs has been reported elsewhere (Stanley *et al.* 2012, 2013); here, we focus on the data captured from interviews with children and young people, parents and staff concerning their perceptions of the SWP offices. The authors also made unstructured observation notes on their fieldwork based on several visits

to SWP offices and informal conversations with staff, and these were used to develop detailed profiles of the five SWPs. These notes and profiles also inform this analysis as the observations recorded data on the physical specificities of the SWP offices as well as information on children's and young people's presence in and use of the SWP offices.

A sample of children and young people aged between 7 and 23 who were cared for by the SWPs was constructed to reflect the key characteristics of the SWP population; their details are shown in Table 1. In total, 121 children and young people in the care of the SWPs were interviewed with 56 being interviewed twice. A semi-structured interview schedule was used which sought children's views on different aspects of the pilots' work including their use of and perceptions of the SWP offices and staff.

Nineteen birth parents were selected for interview on the grounds that they had had a substantial

Table 1 Key characteristics of social work practice (SWP) sample ($N = 121$)

Characteristic	Variable	Percentage of SWP children at first interview
Gender	Male	54
	Female	46
Age	8–10	6
	11–13	15
	14–16	31
	17–19	36
	19+	12
Ethnicity	Asylum seeker	2
	Black and minority ethnic	4
	Dual/mixed heritage	7
	Other	1
	White	84
Education, training, employment status	Mainstream school	31
	Higher education	18
	Not in employment, education or training	10
	Training or employment	5
Length of time in care	Special education	11
	Under 1 year	4
	1 year to under 2 years	3
	2–5 years	24
Placement types	Over 5 years	64
	Not known	4
	Foster carers' home	43
	Supported lodgings	12
	Residential home/unit	7
	Independent flat/house	19
	Parent's/friend's house	8
Kin carers	7	
Homeless	2	

amount of contact with the SWP pilot and they had ongoing contact with their children. In the course of the evaluation, three members of staff were interviewed twice in each of the SWPs, with an additional three members of staff interviewed in the pilots' second year to reflect staff changes. These included the SWP managers, qualified social workers and staff without a social work qualification such as Personal Advisers or Family Support Workers. In total, 31 interviews were completed with SWP staff.

Informed consent procedures were utilised and all interviewees were provided with appropriately formatted information about the evaluation with particular attention given to ensuring that information provided for children and young people was attractive and age-appropriate. NVivo software was used for storing and sorting transcribed data and the analysis was informed by both a thematic framework reflecting key research questions and by emerging themes (Silverman 2011). Ethical approval and scrutiny were provided by the University of Central Lancashire's Ethics Committee, relevant local authorities and the Association of Directors of Children's Services. All participants have been anonymised in the data presented here.

Findings

The SWP pilots and their offices

In the event, the five pilots that started up between 2009 and 2010 embraced a range of models as shown in Table 2. Central government provided approxi-

mately £200,000 per annum start-up funding over a period of 3 years for each local authority that commissioned an SWP pilot. Local authorities across England bid for this funding and it was used to cover a range of set-up costs which included building adaptations, fixtures and fittings, furniture and IT equipment. Table 2 shows that the SWPs occupied a variety of premises, none of which were new or purpose-built.

Location and design

The pilots aimed, with varying degrees of success, to provide offices that were user-friendly and accessible in terms of both 'location' and 'locale' (Cresswell 2009). The four SWP pilots (SWPs A, B, D and F), that were entirely new services, were able to exert some choice over the location and design of the premises they used; however, SWP C which was an existing service continued to use the three local authority offices and the youth centre where it was already located. Decisions about offices were made in collaboration with the commissioning local authority and there were naturally cost considerations as well as restrictions imposed by the availability and nature of the buildings. In three of the pilots, SWP managers and staff gave considerable thought to issues such as office accessibility, design, décor and furnishings with the aim of making the SWP offices attractive, welcoming places that could be used as the setting for contact with birth parents as well as providing meeting space and a workplace for staff. Two of the pilots included kitchens where birth parents and children

Table 2 Social work practice (SWP) premises

SWP	SWP model	Premises
SWP A	In-house SWP: social work team already employed by local authority, already working with some but not all of children and young people in SWP cohort	Semi-detached house formerly used as children's home
SWP B	For-profit organisation outside the local authority that previously delivered social care training. Children and young people transferred into SWP from local authority	Occupied part of a local authority-owned building already occupied by local voluntary organisation
SWP C	Voluntary organisation – already providing care leavers' service in this local authority. Large SWP comprising four teams	SWP spread across three offices in local authority premises with fourth office housed in a youth centre. Two teams later moved into office premises on a trading estate
SWP D	Voluntary organisation with experience of providing social care services for adults – children and young people transferred into SWP from local authority	Ground floor of a previously empty office block in city centre
SWP F	Social enterprise established by group of social workers previously employed by host local authority. Most children and staff transferred to SWP together	Detached privately rented house previously occupied by motor vehicle training course provider

There is no SWP E as this pilot was planned but failed to start up.

were able to cook together on contact visits. Those SWPs with a local catchment area aimed to encourage young people to drop in and provided facilities such as computers and pool tables for their use. Some of the SWP buildings also provided venues for other drop-in services for young people, such as sexual health services.

Three of the pilots spent some of the start-up funding on refurbishing and decorating the premises and buying comfortable and brightly coloured furnishings. As the SWP ethos emphasised staff ownership of the organisation, staff members who moved into new premises enjoyed opportunities to share in these decisions:

...we all came into this building when it was a shell, you know, it was a really totally different to what it is now and we were given the opportunity to bounce some ideas about ... the layout of the building, the colours and so on, so that was really good. (Staff member, SWP D)

There were also attempts made to give children and young people some ownership of the offices. These efforts can best be described as a movement towards the creation of what Gaventa (2006) describes as an 'invited space', that is, one in which service users are invited to participate by those in authority. In three SWPs, young people reported contributing to decisions about the location of the building, its décor or facilities. Staff in SWP D described young people's impact on choice of building and the furniture. In this pilot site, staff reported that young people's views had influenced the choice of an office location that was neutral, in terms of the boundaries of different local gangs:

It's really been beneficial because ... they think of things like we wouldn't, like, 'well I wouldn't go to speak [to social workers in that office] because that's crossing a boundary of a gang and ... I'm in this gang and they're in that gang ...', but they'll drop in here. (Staff member, SWP D)

In SWP F, a 'key ingredient' of the service identified by staff was the homely feel of their premises, with comfortable and friendly contact rooms, spaces that children and young could drop in and use, and communal spaces decorated by young people who worked with a local graffiti artist to decorate an internal wall. Another pilot aimed to give children and young people ownership of the building by doing away with locks and security barriers, and children and young people were able to access most parts of the building freely. However, nearly all the SWP offices were described by staff as having some disadvantages such as the lack of a central location, being situated in a building shared with other council

services or limited access to parking. Where many children were dispersed or placed at a distance from the office in a large local authority or in out-of-area placements, aspirations towards creating a user-friendly building where young people would 'drop in' appeared less realistic and were less likely to be pursued.

Feelings: stigma and normality

Research that has explored the perspectives of children and young people in out-of-home care has identified the stigma of being 'in care' as a common theme in their experiences (Stanley 2007, Dickson *et al.* 2009), and institutional looking or poorly maintained local authority premises can act to reinforce this stigma, reflecting back images of being uncared for or marginalised. The sense of place some children attached to social work offices was associated with negative emotions and they noted that they would rather not see their social worker in an office. This boy stressed that 'normal life' did not involve visiting social workers in offices, rejecting any notion of dependency that might be invoked by a relationship with social services:

M: No, I haven't been there [SWP Office].

INT: ...would you want to go and visit it?

M: No.

INT: Okay, why is that?

M: I don't really like them kind of things, I just like being myself, being a normal kid, just doing things for myself... (Looked after boy, SWP B)

Where the SWP office was a converted house located in a residential area, its non-institutional appearance 'like a house, like one of the private houses' (Looked after girl, SWP F) evoked more positive emotions. This parent characterised the SWP offices as 'homely' and 'warm' and contrasted them to the 'cold', institutional local authority offices:

It's more of a homely place ... which I think is good for the kids ... it's not just white paint and cream paint ... It's not as daunting as when I go up to see the other one's Social Worker ... in the civic offices and that's proper clinical cold, cold, where that's [the SWP office] warm, ... it's ... a warm place where, you know, a lot of Social Service buildings are cold places. (Birth parent)

Locating the SWP offices in a town centre rather than a residential area made them easily accessible and allowed visits to social workers to fit in with daily routines so emphasising their normalcy; an out-of-town centre location for the pilot office was described as 'weird':

...it's a bit weird because it's in a rural ... area, it's hard to get to ... when it was in the town centre, it was easier to get to and easier to talk to her because I say if I needed to talk to her and I was on my dinner break in college, I could just run in, have a quick word, come back out again, back to college, but now ... I'd have to walk all the way up and walk all the way back and I'd probably be late (Care leaver, SWP A)

In these two instances, the feelings associated with the social work office were directly related to the location and the locale. However, the 'warmth' of a building was not explained solely in terms of its appearance and location. Those who described the SWP offices as 'welcoming', 'relaxed' or 'friendly' also described being known to all the staff in the building and having the confidence that they would be recognised by them:

It's not like I'm going into somewhere where I'm not known or I feel shy, and I just go, 'look can I speak to [my social worker]?' So it's nothing like I have to go in and keep my head down is it...? So it's quite nice, it's a welcoming environment. (Care Leaver, SWP A)

It's ... because they make you welcome, they all say 'hello' to you ... and you think 'well I don't know who you are really, I don't know what part you're from but I want that part'.... (Birth parent)

Providing food was another way in which some offices were experienced as personalised and human:

Yeah, and I know my way round, I know where everything is in the cupboards, so if I want anything to eat, I just get it from the cupboards. (Looked after girl, SWP D)

Friendly, yeah, 'are you waiting for [the social worker]? Yes, she's just in her office, she'll be in 2 minutes. Would you like a brew [hot drink]?' ...they ... treat you as human like they are, make you a brew, a conversation.... (Birth parent)

In both these extracts, the sharing or offering of food or drink and the sense of ownership implicit in knowing your way round and being permitted to help yourself from cupboards convey a lack of barriers between professionals and service users as well as normalising the interaction. SWP staff described this harnessing of location and locale to the delivery of a 'personalised' and emotionally warmer service as a conscious, planned process:

...it's a personalised building, we've tried to make it that way, welcoming, it's friendly ... we run an open door policy and this building was purpose picked for us. (Staff, SWP F)

Like children and parents, staff also wanted an office space that reflected back to them a sense of

their own worth. One staff member argued that staff achieved an enhanced sense of their own value from the social relations that took place in the SWP office environment:

...the ownership is for the team, that they feel that they belong to something, that they're coming in and doing something that connects to something. They get that they're not just part of a machine, that they're treated like human beings and that they're seen as a valued individual. (Staff member, SWP D)

Practices: rethinking the purpose of office space

In some SWPs, children and young people were provided with opportunities for engaging in activities in the office premises. This contributed to children's and families' perceptions of a more active identity which involved doing things and having fun rather than having things done to them:

There's couches, there's DVDs, video games, massive plasma screen, the Wii, Xbox and all that, it's quite fun. (Looked after girl, SWP D)

This care leaver emphasised that his use of the SWP offices was about 'organising' rather than receiving assistance: participating in a range of activities available positioned him as active rather than as a passive recipient of state assistance:

INT: So, in the past year, how many times would you say you've been up there?

M: Ooh quite a few times ... they organise different things ... it were very enjoyable ... if they've organised something ... we'll all meet up there and we'll set off to whatever we're doing.

INT: So, its activities, things that they organise do they?

M: Yeah, activities, yeah, I've never gone there for a reason like I needed their help or anything or nothing like that, it's just to organise. (Care leaver, SWP A)

Both parents and children enjoyed the facilities provided in some SWPs to ensure that children and parents could share activities such as cooking or playing on computers during contact sessions:

...like when we have contact, there's fun things to do. And play pool and that. (Looked after boy, SWP D)

To create a place which could provide both activities and a social work service, staff wanted a building that could be used flexibly: not all offices were accessible out-of-hours and, where access was restricted in this way, staff were critical of this. They valued multi-purpose offices that could be used for a range of activities including meetings, contact sessions and drop-in activities for young people. In one SWP, the offices were used to provide a non-clinical,

familiar setting for children to have routine medical examinations. Staff appreciated having a separate space or building that was unique to their own team, but some missed the close proximity to colleagues from other social work teams or associated services and the opportunities for chance meetings that large shared offices afforded.

Discussion

This study has some limitations. The role of place was not a primary research question at the outset; its significance emerged as the SWPs developed and grew. In retrospect, this aspect of the pilots' work could have been explored in greater depth. However, this large-scale evaluation does provide some valuable data on children's, parents' and staff's perceptions of social work offices and identifies key themes in their accounts.

Cresswell's (2009) definition of place has proved useful with the evaluation finding that an office location and locale which were friendly, welcoming and non-institutional acted to reduce perceptions of stigma and dependency on the state and positioned children and their families in an active rather than a passive relationship with the service. Some offices enabled children and parents to develop a sense of place in which they felt treated as 'normal' or 'human', something that they had not always experienced previously in their transactions with social workers. Where children's, young people's and families' sense of place shifted away from feelings of stigma towards feelings of being welcomed and valued, this was achieved both through the material environment and through the small day-to-day human interactions that occurred there.

Some of the SWPs aspired to giving children and young people a sense of ownership of the building. None of the children and young people we interviewed described the SWP offices as 'their place', but some clearly felt that it was a place where they had an identity and were known and recognised. This recognition took the form of being known to other members of the staff team, being addressed by name and welcomed when they arrived at the office. This experience of being known or recognised confers rights and esteem on those who use social work services (Turney 2012, Ridley *et al.* 2013) and, where it was present in the SWP pilots, it was a key element in children's and parents' positive experiences of place. However, not all the SWP offices were described as 'homely', 'friendly' or offering fun activities; some were clearly more successful than others in their use of place.

Location, in terms of accessibility and centrality of the offices, contributed to their normalcy, but while some SWPs had central locations and/or encouraged young people to drop in and use recreational facilities, not all were able to achieve this. Only one SWP succeeded in completely removing physical barriers between service users and staff, and allowed children and young people direct access to the offices without the need for any security barriers other than signing in with a receptionist. This appeared effective in destabilising traditional distributions of power between staff and users, and it was noticeable that in this SWP, children and young people moved freely between spaces with little sense of restriction or boundaries.

Those pilots where staff felt they had exerted some influence in choosing and planning the premises they worked from and which started up in new sites were able to achieve more in terms of providing accessible user-friendly premises. In considering the resources required to achieve this, it is notable that none of the SWP offices were located in newly constructed, purpose-built buildings. This contrasts with other major government initiatives, such as the Sure Start programme which, in its first wave, resulted in 215 new buildings (Ball & Niven 2005). The availability of central government start-up funding and the planning opportunities afforded by setting up a new service in a new place provided the means and the context for adaptations and refurbishments to take place. However, paying attention to and focusing on the issue of place so that it constituted a key plank in the SWP strategy emerged as crucial to delivering an accessible and personalised service.

The pilots' sense of themselves as new, independent organisations may have played a small part in generating the freedom and the urge to innovate and renovate that resulted in a focus on place among some of them. However, one of the SWPs that was more successful in this respect was the in-house pilot that remained within the local authority and most of the SWPs were housed in current or former local government buildings. A readiness to focus on children's and family's sense of place seemed key, and a willingness to direct attention and resources to this issue does not appear to be directly attributable to the SWP model and should not be regarded as unique to SWPs. Contracts, service audit or inspection could usefully focus on the issue of place and the human interaction within it as an aspect of service quality and accessibility for all social work services.

The availability of central government start-up funding clearly played a vital role in allowing the

pilots to realise their ambitions in respect of place. However, the resources available were not sufficient to allow the pilots to engage with populations that were at a distance or scattered across a large area, and attention to place may be most effective in the context of a locally based service or catchment area. Effective use of place also occurred when the concept of place embraced social relationships as well as physical surroundings, confirming that place means people as well as buildings.

Within the broad spectrum of social care services in the United Kingdom, the private sector has led the way in its attention to place, particularly in residential care where there is a substantial market and consumers may exercise choice between a variety of providers. For this sector, attention to place has been a means of attracting and retaining customers, and the management of the physical environment of the home or ward has been found to have a strong influence on the quality of care provided (Lupton & Croft-White 2013). Other services, such as those for children in out-of-home care who exercise little choice in their use of services, need to focus on the issue of place in the absence of such market incentives. Place can embody power inequalities (Philo 2001, Poland *et al.* 2005) so that cream paint conveys an institutional image and glass barriers in reception demarcate the space inhabited by welfare professionals, separating them from those who use services. The argument for attending to place is about the need to combat the shame generated by involvement with the welfare system; the stigma attached to out-of-home care can pervade children's sense of self and has the potential to undermine relationships between families and professionals.

Conclusion

At a point in social work's history where there has been a resurgence of interest in the use of relationship in social work with children and families (Leeson 2010, Turney 2012), a focus on place offers a means of addressing some of the power imbalances which can structure staff–user relationships. These disparities are particularly evident in child protection and in work with children in out-of-home care and their families where coercion and lack of consent can frame the relationship. For those managing, inspecting and working in existing services, attention to such issues as physical barriers between staff and users, the ability of young people to move freely around a building, and the welcome children and families receive on arrival is relevant. Those with responsibility for planning children's services need to consider how

both local people and staff can be involved in planning the design or refurbishment of buildings: the Schools for the Future programme offers some useful examples of such processes (Rudd 2008). Service users' participation in creating places for social work should not however be confined to engagement in the early design stage: practitioners and policy makers could benefit from training to ensure children, young people, families and workers are supported in exercising sustained influence in planning social workplaces which are more welcoming and shared. This might be achieved by practitioners and service users reviewing the locations and locales in which services are delivered and questioning whether they convey care or control. Some of the SWP pilots offer 'practice close' examples of how place can be harnessed to the task of rethinking social work practice; they deliver a clear message that attention to place that makes for a warm, personalised and accessible service appears to foster positive engagement and conveys the value placed on both staff and those who use services.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded and supported by the Department for Education, UK. The views expressed here are those of the authors alone and should not be attributed to the Department for Education. We are grateful to all those who participated in the study and assisted with data collection.

References

- Andrews G.J. (2002) Towards a more place-sensitive nursing research: an invitation to medical and health geography. *Nursing Inquiry* **9**, 221–238.
- Andrews G.J. & Shaw D. (2008) Clinical geography: nursing practice and the (re)making of institutional space. *Journal of Nursing Management* **16**, 463–473.
- Ball M. & Niven L. (2005) *Buildings in Sure Start Local Programmes. National Evaluation Summary*. DfES, Nottingham. Available at: <http://www.ness,bbk.ac.uk/implementation/documents/328.pdf> (accessed on 9/12/2014).
- Broadhurst K., Wastell D., White S. *et al.* (2010) Performing initial assessment: identifying the latent conditions for error in local authority children's services. *British Journal of Social Work* **40** (2), 352–370.
- Clark A. & Percy-Smith B. (2006) Beyond consultation: participatory practices in everyday spaces. *Children, Youth and Environments* **16** (2), 1–9.
- Cresswell T. (2009) Place. In: N. Thrift & R. Kitchin (Eds) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, pp. 169–177. Elsevier, Oxford.
- Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Care Matters: Time for Change*. CM7137. TSO, Norwich.
- Dickson K., Sutcliffe K. & Gough D. (2009) *The Experiences, Views and Preferences of Looked after Children and Young*

- People and Their Families and Carers about the Care System*. Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, London.
- Ferguson H. (2008) Liquid social work: welfare interventions as mobile practices. *British Journal of Social Work* **38** (3), 561–579.
- Ferguson H. (2010) Walks, home visits and atmospheres: risk and the everyday practices and mobilities of social work and child protection. *British Journal of Social Work* **40**, 1106–1117.
- Ferguson H. (2011) *Child Protection Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Gaventa J. (2006) Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. *IDS Bulletin* **37** (6), 23–33.
- Holland S. (2014) Trust in the community: understanding the relationship between formal, semi-formal and informal child safeguarding in a local neighbourhood. *British Journal of Social Work* **44**, 384–400.
- Jack G. (2010) Place matters: the significance of place attachments for children's well-being. *British Journal of Social Work* **40**, 755–771.
- Jeyasingham D. (2014a) The production of space in children's social work: insights from Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Dialectics. *British Journal of Social Work* **44** (7), 1879–1894.
- Jeyasingham D. (2014b) Open spaces, supple bodies? Considering the impact of agile working on social work office practices. *Child and Family Social Work* Article first published online: 17 FEB 2014 (accessed on 9/12/2014) doi:10.1111/cfs.12130.
- Jowell R. (2003) *Trying It Out: The Role of Pilots in Policy Making*. Report of a Review of Government Pilots. Cabinet Office, London.
- Le Grand J. (2007) *Consistent Care Matters: Exploring the Potential of Social Work Practices*. Department for Education and Skills, London.
- Leeson C. (2010) The emotional labour of caring about looked-after children. *Child and Family Social Work* **15**, 483–491.
- Lupton C. & Croft-White C. (2013) *Respect and Protect: The Experience of Older People and Staff in Hospital and Care Homes*. Comic Relief, London.
- Mannion G. (2007) Going spatial, going relational: why 'listening to children' and children's participation needs reframing. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* **28** (3), 405–420.
- Moss P. & Petrie P. (2002) *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood*. Routledge, London.
- Philo C. (2001) Accumulating populations: bodies, institutions and space. *International Journal of Population Geography* **7**, 473–490.
- Poland B., Lehoux P., Holmes D. & Andrews G. (2005) How place matters: unpacking technology and power in health and social care. *Health and Social Care in the Community* **13** (2), 170–180.
- Ridley J., Larkins C., Farrelly N., Hussein S., Austerberry H., Manthorpe J. & Stanley N. (2013) Investing in the relationship: practitioners' relationships with looked-after children and care leavers in Social Work Practices. *Child & Family Social Work*. Article first published online: 11 NOV 2013 (accessed on 9/12/2014) doi:10.1111/cfs.12109.
- Rudd T. (2008) Redesigning education: modelling transformation through co-design around BSF. In: *Transforming Schools for the Future: A Collection of Provocation Papers*. Futurelab and Toshiba. Available at: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/FUTL79/FUTL79.pdf> (accessed on 4/10/2013).
- Silverman D. (2011) *Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn. Sage, London.
- Stanley N. (2007) Young People's and Carers' Perspectives on the mental health needs of looked after adolescents. *Child and Family Social Work* **12** (3), 258–267.
- Stanley N., Austerberry H., Bilson A. et al. (2012) *Social Work Practices: Report of the National Evaluation*. DfE, London.
- Stanley N., Austerberry H., Bilson A., Farrelly N., Hussein S., Manthorpe J. & Ridley J. (2013) Turning away from the public sector in children's out-of-home care: an English experiment. *Child and Youth Services Review* **35** (1), 33–39.
- Stevens I. (2006) Consulting youth about residential care environments in Scotland. *Children, Youth and Environments* **16** (2), 51–76.
- Turney D. (2012) A relationship-based approach to engaging involuntary clients: the contribution of recognition theory. *Child and Family Social Work* **17**, 149–159.
- Wiles J. (2005) Conceptualizing place in the care of older people: the contributions of geographical gerontology. *Journal of Clinical Nursing* **14**, 100–108.