information services
gwasanaethau gwybodaeth

Listening to the experts: Learning about relationships and their impact on educational experiences from children and young people in state care

Corresponding author

Alyson Rees

Cardiff University

School of Social Sciences,

Glamorgan Buildings,

King Edward VII Avenue,

Cardiff CF10 3WT

029-20875261

ReesA1@Cardiff.ac.uk

Louise Roberts

Cardiff University

School of Social Sciences,

Glamorgan Buildings,

King Edward VII Avenue,

Cardiff University

029-20874983

RobertsL18@Cardiff.ac.uk

Dawn Mannay

Cardiff University

School of Social Sciences,

Glamorgan Buildings,

King Edward VII Avenue,

Cardiff CF10 3WT

029-20874774

MannayDI@Cardiff.ac.uk

Rhiannon Evans

Cardiff University

Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health,

Spark Social Sciences Research Park,

Maindy Road

029-20870099

EvansRE8@Cardiff.ac.uk

Eleanor Staples

University of Bristol
School for Policy Studies
8 Priory Road
Bristol BS8 1TZ
0117 3310867
Eleanor.Staples@Bristol.ac.uk

Sophie Hallett

School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

Glamorgan Buildings,

King Edward VII Avenue,

Cardiff CF10 3WT

029-20876909

HallettS1@Cardiff.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper reports on the findings from a qualitative study involving 67 children, in or having left care. The research formed part of a project commissioned by Welsh Government which was concerned with educational experiences in Wales, UK. Visual and creative techniques were used to support children's and young people's participation in semi-structured interviews and focus groups and care experienced peer researchers took an active role in the fieldwork. The study identified some of the unintended conflicts, consequences, and challenges of well-meaning practice interventions, and highlighted the importance of working with and listening to the experiences of children and young people in care. It also emphasised the salience of children's and young people's relational well-being, something rarely considered in an educational context, and argued that the relational aspects of negotiating the care experience merit further attention. Participants' experiences suggest that there is still much to do in dismantling the structural barriers and the impact of being labelled as 'looked after', but that by engaging with and listening to the accounts of young people we can move towards developing more informed and effective strategies that can improve both policy and practice.

Key words

Introduction and background

The educational attainment and future life opportunities of children in state care is of increasing concern (Hojer, Lindberg, Nielsen & Gustafsson 2018; Kääriälä, Haapakorva, Pekkarinen & Sund 2019; Mannay, Rees, & Roberts (Eds.) 2019; McNamara, P, Montserrat, & Wise (Eds.) 2019). Within the UK nations, children in care achieve less well educationally than the general population (children not in care and not in need) (see Conelly & Furnivall, 2013; Jackson, 2010; Mannay, Rees, & Roberts, (Eds.). Across all key stages and into higher education this gap only widens (Stein, 2012). Whilst education is not the only predictor of success, the scarcity of employment opportunities (often gate kept by increasing educational requirements) keeps it firmly on the agenda (Berridge, 2012). The international literature has also consistently reported that children placed in state care do less well at school than their peers on a range of indicators, including literacy, numeracy, attendance, suspension and graduation (Berger, Cancian, Han & Rios-Salas, 2015; Feguson and Wolkow, 2012; Hojer, Lindberg, Nielsen & Gustafsson 2018; Schlerr, 2007). Jackson and Cameron's (2014) study across five European countries found that young people in state care were around five times less likely to attend further or higher education.

Whilst the exact nature of the relationship between being in care and educational attainment is unclear, Berridge (2012) argues that the care system is generally beneficial, and not inherently negative, for children's education. There is evidence to suggest that care provides an environment that is more conducive to education than that experienced by children 'in need' and has been described as a protective factor (Sebba et al. 2015). Furthermore, a systematic review of the literature by O'Higgins et al. (2015, p. 13) found that "being in care does not appear to be harmful to children's academic performance" and highlights the need for proactive strategies to help children thrive and for research to include the "the different experiences and characteristics of children" (2015, p.13).

These arguments could support the view that traumatic pre-care experiences are the primary reason for low educational achievement (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998; O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007). However, given that the majority of children and young people enter the care system between the ages of 13 and 15, it is likely that the care system is a significant variable impacting educational outcomes (Stein, 2012). Underachievement is likely a combination of

shortcomings in the education and care systems, as well as the difficult and distressing circumstances that young people have experienced (Fletcher-Campbell & Hall, 1990).

In both England and Wales, there has been a rash of policy development and legislative action aimed at improving the educational outcomes of children in care -Children Act 1989; Children Act 2004; Children and Young Persons Act 2008; Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; Welsh Assembly Government (Welsh Government, 2007; Welsh Government, 2016; Welsh Government, 2017). This drive has focused on improving relationships between a range of professionals, practitioners and local services, albeit not with or between young people, in order to reduce the achievement gap between the general population and those in care. It is the '*with* and *between'* young people, which is the focus of this paper.

Since devolution in 1999, the Welsh Government has developed its own policies and guidance for local authorities, which aim to tackle the issue of the 'underachievement' or a lack of opportunity to thrive for children in care. Several educational interventions have been developed for those who are looked after and in compulsory education: the establishment of the local authority education coordinator to track progress; an education support worker to provide remedial support; a designated teacher and the Personal Education Plan (Welsh Government, 2007; Welsh Government, 2016). Whilst some fairly modest improvements have been noted, the overall educational attainment of children and young people in care remains significantly below that of the general population (Welsh Government, 2016).

Despite a formal commitment to children's rights (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004), and the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2017) call for the involvement of young people in all aspects of the research process, the views of care-experienced young people have been largely absent in the development, implementation and evaluation of educational initiatives (Authors 2017 a). The scant engagement with care experienced young people in educational research has contributed to a lack of focus on relational aspects of children's lives, yet these relational aspects are an area of significant concern (Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers, 2016). Relational theory challenges conventional assumptions around self, independence, autonomy and 'individualism' and instead foregrounds the establishment of mutual connection in relationships a central human drive (Mitchell, 2000). This article foregrounds relationality as a conceptual framework through which to explore the accounts of care-experienced children and young people.

Research Aims and Questions

In 2015, the Welsh Government commissioned CASCADE, the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre to undertake a research study to explore the education of care-experienced children and young people in Wales (for full report see Authors 2015). The study addressed three main research questions:

1. What are the future educational aspirations of care-experienced children and young in Wales?

2. What are the education experiences of care-experienced children and young people in Wales?

3. What recommendations do care-experienced children and young people for service provision improvement to ensure the realisation of their educational aspirations?

Methodology

The study comprised a systematic review and primary qualitative study. The systematic review is presented elsewhere (Authors 2017b). The qualitative component is explored in this paper. The study sample comprised 67 children and young people (aged between 6-27 years). Young people were purposely sampled through the networks of the research partners (The Fostering Network in Wales and Voices from Care Cymru), via foster carers, support groups and local authority leaders.

Sample Demographics
Of the sample (n=67), 39 children and young people were aged between six and 16 and they participated in semi-structured interviews as an element of whole day activity sessions, which involved a larger number of children and young people. Of these 39 participants, 22 were five-11 years; there were eight girls and 12 boys, all of whom were in foster care and in mainstream school. There were 17 participants aged 11-16, six girls and 11 boys, 16 of whom were in mainstream school and one was in a Pupil Referral Unit.

The focus groups involved 26 young people over 16 years of age, eleven females and fifteen males. All had been in foster care at some point, 12 were currently in residential care and one was in kinship care. Many of these participants had experienced moves across foster care and residential care, and they had a range of educational experiences including mainstream school, Pupil Referral Units and further education colleges. Additionally, two young women

university students aged 21 took part in an individual interview. The vast majority of participants were white, with only one child identifying as British Asian and another as mixed/Black Caribbean.

Data Production

Whilst efforts to provide a platform for the experiences and perspectives of young people are increasing, "critics point to the risk related to presenting children's voices as authentic and unproblematic, without taking on board the context in which they are produced" (Saldanha & Nybell, 2016, p. 4). Therefore, this section offers an overview of the context in which data was generated in this study.

The mosaic approach adopted in this study appreciated the importance of designing creative and participatory methods when undertaking research with children (Clark & Moss, 2011; Clark & Statham, 2005; Gabb & Fink, 2015). The mosaic approach recognises children as competent and active subjects, capable of providing information about themselves (Clark and Moss 2011). The term 'mosaic' refers to a multi-method approach which does not simply rely only on oral language to recognise children's voices, rather each technique of creative data production contributes to a mosaic of perspectives and voices that develop dialogue and reflection (Clark and Moss 2011).

Accordingly, we offered a range of visual and creative activities including t-shirt and bag printing, jewellery creation, clay modelling and games. These activities were available to all children and young people who attended these sessions whether or not they took part in the individual interviews. For those interested in participating in the research elements of the activity days, interviews were conducted which included an optional engagement with emotion maps (see Gabb & Singh, 2015) and sandboxing (see Authors, 2017b).

In the emotion map activity, children were provided with card, paper, coloured pencils and pens, and emoticon stickers representing happiness and sadness, to create a mind-map of salient aspects of their school life. The sandboxing facilitated interviews featured boxes filled with sand and an array of figures and objects for children to create scenes related to their school experience and/or future aspirations. The sand scenes and emotion sticker activities then formed the basis of an elicitation interview where participants provided an account of what the figures signified (see Mannay and Staples, 2019).

As in earlier research studies the choice of these creative techniques enabled forms of collaborative and participant led data production, which are not always available in more traditional question and answer based interview approaches (Johnson, Pfister & Vindrola-Padros , 2012; O'Kane, 2008). The activities helped to reduce both the power imbalance of a one-to-one interview and enabled enjoyable, mutually interactive experiences.

For participants aged 16 and over, six focus groups were held involving twenty-six care-experienced young people. Many of the participants noted that they were motivated to attend the focus groups because they facilitated an opportunity to come together and meet others in the same situation as themselves. The focus groups enabled a safe space to share perspectives, consider similarities and differences in experiences, and spark ideas for further discussion (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). The focus groups involved a range of visual prompts to encourage discussion, including a 'bombs and shields' activity which participants engaged with to denote aspects that had inhibited or protected their progress within education.

Much progress has been made in bringing children's voices into research and there has been a move from "child as the object of (research), to a focus on the child as subject and actor in research" (Mason and Danby 2011, p. 185). The use of peer researchers has become an increasingly popular means of generating data with young people in the care system (Lushey & Munro, 2015; Stein & Verweijen-Slamnescu, 2012). In this study, two care-experienced peer researchers, trained and supported by members of the research team informed the design of the focus groups, helped to develop the focus groups questions and facilitated the sessions.

Involving peer researchers worked to counteract the power imbalance between researcher and participant. This approach recognised the value of the peer researchers' depth of experience and '*lived*' knowledge and the expertise of peer researchers steered the research team, and initiated changes that were then incorporated into the research activities. Lushey and Munro (2015) issue a note of caution that whilst peer researchers can yield rich data, it is essential to ensure adequate training, resource, and support. However, in this study, the researchers organised formal training and funding for care experienced peer researchers, and those involved had prior involvement in research projects (see Staples, Roberts, Lyttleton-Smith & Hallett 2019).

Two additional interviews were conducted with care-experienced young people who were attending university. These two young people were recruited via an email circulated by a care

leavers support network, a student support organisation and liaison with relevant contacts in several universities across Wales. The interview schedule was semi-structured and incorporated questions and themes generated from the previous interviews and focus groups.

Ethical Considerations

Approval for the research was granted by Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee. Information and consent forms were provided in accessible formats to children, young people and carers of children aged under 18. In order to protect their identity pseudonyms were selected by participants. Carers, children and young people had to actively opt-in to the study. Care was taken to ensure that children and young people were provided with opportunities to confirm their participation in the study, and researchers were sensitive to the needs all the individuals in the study, ensuring that they were comfortable throughout the fieldwork activities.

Analysis

 Data generation and analysis were conducted iteratively, with themes arising being discussed in future focus groups. All data from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically (Seale 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We used the Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage model of thematic analysis, of (i) familiarisation with the data (ii) initial coding (iii) generating themes (iv) reviewing and verifying themes (v) defining and naming themes (vi) writing up.

Data was indexed and coded by one researcher, a second re-read the data and verified the initial codes. A coding frame was then developed. Two researchers undertook a further reading of the data to refine and identify any additional codes. The themes were then generated, these were reviewed and verified by the second researcher, before defining, naming and writing up. The themes were cross referenced to gender of participants to look for similarities and differences.

The visual materials, which were photographed at the point of data production, acted as tools of elicitation, rather than objects of analysis per se, they were however drawn upon to illuminate and extend the relevant interview transcripts (Mannay, 2010).

Whilst the data generated can be considered insightful it is recognised that the findings may not have captured the full range of experiences and perspectives of care experienced young

people in Wales, as a qualitative study cannot generalise to the general population of children looked after (Silverman, 2014). For example, the majority of participants had been placed in foster care and had been educated in mainstream school. A more differentiated data set may have been generated by increased participation of young people in alternative forms of education and substitute care, as well as those unconnected to supportive organisations. Nevertheless, the multimodal, qualitative approach generated a nuanced data set, that have been used to generate theoretical propositions that can be explored with larger samples of care-experienced children and young people in future UK or international based studies.

Findings

Three central meta-themes emerged from the process of data analysis, which broadly map onto the research questions addressed as part of the study. The first relates to the educational aspirations of children and young people. The second relates to their educational experiences, and includes subthemes of fitting in, difference, resource and relational connections. The third relates to recommendations for future provision, but as these were not considered independently of children and young people's discussion of prior experiences, they have been integrated within the second meta-theme.

Educational and Aspiration

In contrast to earlier studies (Honey, Rees & Griffley, 2011), many of the children that participated in this study voiced clear aspirations for future careers and employment. Boys (aged 5-11) discussed the gendered occupations of builder, footballer, police man and farmer. While girls in this age group wanted to be beauticians, shop keepers, teachers, doctors or vets. The career aspirations seemed less gendered for the older group (aged 11-16), as participants discussed wanting to be police, doctors and vets across genders.

Frequently, children connected their choice of career to something that they were familiar with, and to people with whom they had some form of relationship; these included ambitions to enter hairdressing, teaching, farming, acting, and policing. For example, Elsa (female, age 7) wanted to a 'shopkeeper' just like the 'one in (the area)' in which she lived. Future aspirations were often influenced by significant family members, friends or role models in their support network:

> *I might be a builder… or a carpenter… might even be an engineer… My bamp* [grandfather] *does it. He's an engineer.* (Neymar, male, age 9).

Many of the younger children were confident in their abilities and optimistic in their outlook, having no sense that their future careers may be in any way limited. Similarly, some of the older children drew on those relationships around them for inspiration:

> *I want to become a mechanic when I'm older .... Like I help my foster brother a lot with his car, if he's got anything wrong with his car, so we do a lot with that… he teaches me what he knows and then if I know something that he doesn't know we like to teach each other.* (Bob, male, age 15)

Caring and relational experiences strongly influenced career aspirations, with many participants wanting to work in an area where they could act in a reciprocal and nurturing capacity. Given all of the children had experience of foster, kinship or residential care, their career choices were often linked to the employment roles that they had interacted with, and caring was positioned as a valued aspiration:

> *It's just through my whole life I've been looking after my younger sister and my nieces, because they are all younger than me … I've always wanted to do it* [work in childcare] *and it makes me happy.* (Alesha, female, age 16)

Several children expressed a desire to work with animals, again from a caring perspective. Caitlyn (age 11, female) stated '*In the future, when I get older…hmm be a vet*'. And Harry (age 8, male) wanted to be '*(An) RSPCA person…like take animals to a safe place.*'

The wish to make a positive, caring contribution through their future employment was also evident for other young people. For example, Bishop (age 11, male) discussed providing aid in humanitarian crises, while others expressed a wish to help other children in similar situations to themselves:

> *I want to work with kids in care when I'm older because I know what it's like and I've been through it most of my life. So I can actually be one of those people who turn around and say 'I understand', and actually understand.* (Katie, 16 + female, focus group)

Katie's use of 'I understand', and 'actually understand' suggests that young people may feel misunderstood, and her aspiration to work with children in care can be seen as a commitment to offer an informed base of support, which can be more easily negotiated by someone who knows 'what it's like'.

The impact of family and care issues meant that education and career ambitions were not always primary considerations for some young people who prioritised relationships, as Bishop (age 11, male) stated:

> *What I want is just someone to be with forever when I'm older ... someone who will look after me ... I just want to have a family. I wouldn't mind making a lot of money, just in case I have a family so we're actually able to look after them and keep them safe.* (Bishop, age 11, male).

These caring aspirations perhaps surprisingly did not seem gendered, as both male and females made mention of them.

In summary, a wide variety of future ambitions were discussed by the young people over the course of the research. As found in previous research (Davey, 2006; DCSF, 2010) younger participants' aspirations were arguably indistinguishable from what would be expected from children not in care; they appeared to be fully motivated and at this juncture believed that they could succeed like any other child. The findings suggest that relational family and care experiences were influential, as many discussions around aspirations for the future were altruistic, rather than individualistic (Bauman, 2007) and featured a commitment to positive relationships and connections (Holland, 2010). It may be that the young people put greater store on positive relationships, having had more experience of fractured relationships than other children. Young people were appreciative when kindness had been shown, rather than expecting it as the norm, thus they wished to emulate this; this valuing of care is often framed as an ethic of care (Tronto, 1994) and has been discussed in relation to fostering (Authors, 2014; Holland, 2010). Rather than lacking in aspiration from an early stage, children and young people's educational and work-based ambitions appeared to diminish as they got older and it is to the mundane, often over-looked, everyday barriers which young people face, as they proceed through education that we now move.

Educational Experiences

Fitting in or standing out

As with aspirations, younger children in particular, often presented as unaware or unconcerned with difference in school and factors related to their looked after status were rarely raised.

For example, Caitlyn (age 10, female) described school as:

Great, super, supercalafagilisticexpialidocious.

Younger participants talked generally about their teachers, their friends and the things they liked doing – counting, painting, story-time, spelling. As would be expected from children not in care, some found school really enjoyable, while less enthusiasm was apparent from others who positioned the school experience as 'boring' and 'work':

*Work, work and work. School is a bit boring. (*Musa, Age 8, male*)*

The potential for school to offer routine and 'normality' was raised by some participants and the chance to be with friends was highly valued:

I always have good days in school… doing normal lessons and being with my friends. (Alesha, age, 16, female)

And we'd [group of friends] *all walk in together, walk out together. … I knew some people had a bit of problems but generally like when you look around everyone seems to be getting on with it.* (John, male, 16 + focus group)

These accounts support the view that educational facilities provide valuable opportunities to maintain relationships, access peer support and 'feel normal' (see Davey, 2006). However, attendance at school and college also had the potential to highlight and exacerbate the difference in young people's circumstances. Older participants, in particular, felt that they were made to stand out as being different and described having their education regularly disrupted because of meetings with social workers, reviews, health assessments and counselling (see also Jackson & Martin, 1998). Disruptions were often caused by some of the measures put in place to support children. Such situations were portrayed as embarrassing and exposing, highlighting difference and sometimes prompting unwelcome questions from peers as Katie who was in mainstream school noted:

They used to have it [review] *during the day and…. So sometimes I would have to miss the day off school … obviously I wanted to be a part of it because I want to know, I want to find out what they're saying about me. So sometimes I would have to miss the day off school.* (Katie, 16 +, female, focus group)

Megan who was at university, remembered what it had been like being singled out when she was in mainstream school,

The school just kind of let her [social worker] *get on with it and I'd be in a lesson, she'd usually wait until it was my favourites because she knew that I'd be there, and then*

13

she'd like knock on the door and be like 'oh can I have a word?' And just take me out. (Megan, aged 21, female)

In addition to the educational time lost whilst attending these meetings, engagement in other lessons was also disrupted, as participants struggled to manage their emotions before and after such events. Consequently, participants were generally critical of such meetings and appointments being arranged in school time, as this was dually disruptive to their education. Whilst these arguments have been made as long ago as 1998 (Jackson & Martin) this nevertheless seems to be a pervasive factor. Given many of the children noted that meetings were held in school time, it might appear that the needs of the professionals still seem to be prioritised over those of the children when planning meetings and reviews. When held in such circumstances are bound to reduce the likelihood of a child being able to meaningfully contribute (see also Diaz, 2018). Being taken out of classes also marked them as different. Discussions of the everydayness of difference were common and they were facilitated by the open nature of the fieldwork, but these mundane examples of exposure and lack of sensitivity combine to produce negative impacts on the young person's sense of self-worth, their ability to fit in and on their education more generally.

Difference in stability and friendships

Disruptions in education were also the consequence of unstable living arrangements, almost all participants had experienced placement moves, and these were often accompanied by changes to their schooling. Despite attempts to monitor and reduce placement moves (Welsh Government, 2016) this has not always become a reality, as older participants repeatedly connected this aspect of their lives with diminished opportunities for academic progression:

I got moved onto over 20 placements… (Jay, 16 + focus group, male)

Obviously if your life is unstable, your education is unstable, and then that's your future ruined. (Holly, 16 + focus group)

Expressing his frustration with the temporary and changeable nature of children and young people's lives, Spencer (16 + focus group, male) notes that this makes it virtually impossible to keep up with his peers:

I found, obviously, moving around schools a lot, because I moved from Wales to England and it was like during that transition of like for a year I was out of education so I was playing a catch-up game, always, like right the way up through school until I left, I was always trying to catch up.

Many of the participants of all ages linked their experiences of being in care to their lack of friendships, which in turn impacted school participation. Isabelle (age 11, female) in mainstream school talked about how 'it was hard with friends' and whilst her foster carers had tried to keep her in contact with her best friend, she noted:

But we're not (best friends now) because we're not in the same school and we don't see each other as much as we used to.

Jeff (age 12, male) stated '*It's rubbish when you move schools, basically you don't know anyone there*'. And Jessica, (age 9, female) said '*I've not made any friends…no*' (in the new school). Without a friendship network, one might imagine that it is difficult to feel accepted, confident and settled in a school setting. For older young people these relationship difficulties continued and sometimes exacerbated:

I never got invited to parties outside of school… because I wasn't well-known, as you know, obviously they all knew each other. (Paul, 16 + focus group, male).

These forms of instability have long been charted as a negative factor (Aldgate, Colton, Ghate and Heath, 1992; Girling, 2019). Moving home is a particularly difficult transition for children because contact with previous foster carers is not always encouraged, friendships as illustrated here are fractured and punctuated, and new relationships have to be forged with teachers, foster carers and pupils. Social work is also noted for the high turnover of staff (Hussein, Stevens, Manthorpe & Moriarty, 2011) particularly in Children's Services (Diaz, 2018). All young people require continuity of relationship to bolster self-esteem and coping mechanisms (NICE, 2016). Whilst aiming to reduce the number of placement moves, ten percent of children in care in Wales still experienced three or more placements during 2015-2016 (CoramBAAF 2016).

Being treated as different

As highlighted in previous studies (Elliott, 2002; Davey, 2006), several participants reported that they were treated as 'different' by others within school because of their looked after status. The stigmatising impact of being in care was acknowledged by participants as they reflected on being labelled as 'troubled' or 'troubling' as they got older:

> *I had like a file because obviously I was from a children's home and most of the young people that were in my school that were in children's homes had files on them, like behavioural and risk and it said on there .... may get temperamental.* (Leah, 16 + focus group, female).

Similarly, as others have found (Davey, 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002) the assumption of young people as less academically able was a recurrent issue for some older participants:

> *As soon as I went into care, then went back to school and my teachers majority of them treated me completely different, because I was in care they moved me down sets, they put me in special help, ... put me in support groups. And I was just like I don't need all this shit, I've only moved house, that's it I was like yeah I might be in care but the only difference to me is I've moved house, that's it... they looked at all my papers and where I was in my levels and that and they was like you're more than capable of being in top set but we don't think you're going to be able to cope.* (Jane, 16 + focus group, female)

The anticipation of difficulties and subsequent assumptions made by teachers were not always well received by children (see also Authors et al., 2017a). Some felt that the labels ascribed to them lowered teachers' expectations and that they were less challenged as a result:

> *I think with people in care, some other people look at us and say that 'oh they're in care, they're going to fail'.* (Abigail, 16 + focus group, female).

> *They had expectations that basically I was going to be thick as shit'.* (Stephen 16 + focus group, male).

Being treated differently was apparent in the school provision of some additional supports made available to young people. These included both practical measures, such as offering extra tuition, as well as emotional support and understanding. The acknowledgement of difference was well-intentioned, and some measures were well-received. Suarez (age 15, male) stated that if he was having a bad day he needs to '*get out of the situation but I have got good*

people to go and talk to like Miss [Teachers Name]'. However, for other young people such attempts exacerbated feelings of difference and were unwanted, for example, Alex described being assigned an educational support worker to sit with her during lessons:

> *I used to try and skive and that because my carer was sitting there and I just didn't want it, I was like I don't need that, it's singling me out and it's making me seem special when I'm not, I'm a normal person. ….* (Alex, 16 + focus group, female)

Where support provision seeks to respond to differences in needs and circumstances, then it should be sensitively delivered in conjunction with the wishes of the young people.

Differences in resources and finance

Related to issues of appropriate support, the provision of necessary materials such as pens, pencil cases, books and access to computers was highlighted as an important aspect in enabling young people to participate fully in education and ensuring they did not stand out. Participants recalled positive examples where carers, professionals or local authority policies ensured they were equipped and ready for school. However, there was significant variation in practice and contrasts in provision which emerged over the course of data production. This inconsistency has been attributed to the lack of shared delivery plans between the Welsh Government and local authorities and to short-term grant funding for projects (WAO, 2012). This included some local authorities ensuring all young people were issued with laptops, while children from other areas described fighting for provision, enduring cycles of repeated requests and rejections:

> *I've had a good experience I know, [but] my brother hasn't, like he had, he was doing drama and … you're not allowed to wear nothing but black. Black joggers, black t-shirts, black jackets, and you're not allowed to wear jeans nothing, not like shoes, you had to wear trainers. Well, he couldn't afford all that because he was living semi-independently in a supported house only on £57 a week.* (Holly, 16 + focus group, female)

Some participants reported being excluded from trips and after-school activities because of difficulties with money, transport and securing the necessary permissions. These type of exclusions isolated young people and further limited their abilities to develop and maintain peer networks within school. At an early age some children were already anticipating difficulties in respect of funding provision for continued academic study:

> *But some people when they go to university or college they can't afford it. And you never know, with me, I might not be able to afford to go to a university or college because of all the money that I need because it's thousands and thousands of pounds.* (Isabelle, age 11, female)

For older participants, in particular, there was discernible frustration at 'red tape' and the lack of parity experienced by young people in care, in respect of resources and financial support, across different settings and locations. This included some young people being exposed to disagreements about who should pay for certain provisions:

> [They] *will argue with each other about who pays for transport, who pays for you know books and stationary and that kind of thing, and that's ridiculous. You know it shouldn't have to be, 'oh you're paying for it, you're paying for it', you know? It's a child, it's a human being.* (Stephen, 16 + focus group, male).

Comments such as these were difficult for young people to hear and had the potential to dampen aspirations and damage self-esteem. Exposure to such discussions not only confirmed perceptions of difference, but also positioned the young people as burdens to those tasked with supporting them.

Supportive opportunities for relational connections

Although not always readily available to them, opportunities to connect with others who had similar experiences of being in care were highly valued by young people, this was seen to help mitigate feelings of difference and assisted in helping to normalise their situation:

> *This is the reason why I came here because I thought you know it would be nice to see other people who are in the same situation.* (Stephen, 16 + focus group, male).

> *Knowing that everyone (there) has been through the same as you have… and knowing that we can make a difference for each other.* (Abigail, 16 + focus group, female).

> *We can give each other advice when things get hard. We can't really get that elsewhere.* (Paige, 16 + focus group, female).

Providing opportunities for young people to develop relationships (Ryan, 2012) with those in a similar situation was seen as empowering, creating the possibility for the giving and receiving

of mutual, reciprocal support. There may be some tension between not wanting to stand out, but also wanting to meet with others who are in the same situation as yourself. However, amongst those also in care, the young people felt that they did not stand out and where this is facilitated sensitively (within or outside of education) this was seen as supportive, as is the case with other marginalised young people, for example, those with disabilities (Hewett, Douglas and Keil 2015). Clearly, young people want to have the opportunity to meet with others who 'actually understand' and to be in a position to provide mutual care and support, and broaden their friendship networks (see also Mannay, Smith, Turney, Jennings & Davies 2022).

Discussion

This paper has explored the aspirations and educational experiences of children and young people, in and having left care in Wales. The progressive methods employed enabled a more open approach where participants could lead discussions and engendered an insight into the everyday, mundane aspects of educational life that are often overlooked, yet combine to create educational disadvantage.

The findings of this study echo problems identified in previous research and suggest limited progress in changing the educational realities for children and young people in care. The potential for poor educational experience, disruption as a result of placement moves, and lower expectations in terms of future success and achievement have all previously been identified (Kahan, 1979; Page & Clark, 1997; Jackson, 1987; Martin & Jackson, 2002). Despite this, consideration of children and young people's views and experiences has enabled a more nuanced understanding of the barriers and facilitators to academic attainment, many of which relate to the impact of relationships.

Positive, stable, mutual relationships and an ethic of care (Holland 2010) were central to young people's aspirations, valuing care they had received, or would like to receive, and envisioning opportunities to reciprocate care for others in the future (Authors, 2017; Williams 2004). Despite this, opportunities to build, foster and maintain positive friendships within education settings were sometimes undermined by standard practice, and the realities of young people's circumstances outside of education often involved unstable relationships and uncertain futures. Regular placement moves, limited means of maintaining contact with previous foster carers (Community Care, 2016) or possibilities for retaining friendships (Ryan, 2012), combined with difficulties in contact with family (Pye & Rees, 2019) all

contribute to limited relational networks of support. This is of particular concern when considered in the context of existing research showing positive associations of placement stability on a range of outcomes, including physical and mental health, emotional and behavioural issues, as well as educational success (Jones et al., 2011; Pecora 2012; Welbourne & Leeson, 2012; Rock, Michelson, Thomson, & Day, 2013).

Teachers who have lesser expectations of care experienced children and made more allowances for them because of difficulties in their personal life were seen as unhelpful. In this way, while the underlying ethos can engender support, how this is contextualised and experienced in the everyday lives of children and young people in care needs to be problematised and considered. In order to remain sensitive to privacy and minimise overt forms of stigmatising visibility, professionals and carers must listen to and work with children and young people in care, drawing on their expertise to develop and generate supportive strategies in accordance with individual needs and preferences.

Relational theory argues that a fundamental aspect of human development is the ability to make connections through relationships. Growth and development are seen as occurring within relationships and a relational model connects people and networks, aligning with an ecological framework (Freedberg, 2009). As Folgheraiter (2007) outlines,

> Relational social work engages with existing networks to enhance their resilience and ability and capacity to resolve difficulties…These networks can include family members, friends, teachers and any other significant actors who have a contribution to make (2007, p. 265).

Whilst family members may not be readily accessible for children in care, their relationships may nevertheless be a key source of inspiration and support. Similarly, teachers, carers, peers and friends can form part of young people's relational networks and provide important sources of support. The relational model of social work draws on notions of agency, partnership and reciprocity (Folgheraiter, 2004). Accordingly, a relational social worker is effective when they realise that a solution to a problem emerges from within existing social relations. The relational social worker does not simply directly provide help, but instead supports and links people together so that networks come into being and are strengthened

(Folgheraiter, 2007, p. 269). Tew (2013) also discusses the significance of relational 'capital' for wellbeing, and the importance of strengthening this.

Children and young people under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) have the right to be supported in their relationships with others where congruent with their best interest. However, relational fracture is a common experience for care experienced young people and most have a strong desire for better relationships (Winter, 2015 p. 3). Briheim-Crockall, Michelmore, Baker, Oluwanifemi, Taylor & Selwyn's (2020) study of care leavers' subjective well-being emphasises the importance of relationships with workers, family and friends. As the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers note "good well-being underpins the chances of success…when it comes to promoting looked after children's well-being, we know that positive stable and trusting relationships are of paramount importance" (2016, p. 4). This is also drawn out in the Care Inquiry Report (2013) entitled 'Making not breaking; building relationships for our most vulnerable children', suggesting relationships and the quality of those relationships should be the lens though which all work with children is approached.

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of relationships with peers in particular as an important aspect of wellbeing. Selwyn, Magnus, Symonds & Briheim-Crockall (2018) found that 9.5% of care experienced children age 11-18 did not have at least one good friend. Good friends are an important source of support and help reduce social isolation (Baker, 2017). 'Relationships are best seen as networks rather than as a set of sequential linear connections' (Winter, 2015 p. 13). Thus, relationships need to be cherished and prioritised. These relationships when viewed as networks and foundations, should be facilitated by the relational social worker to support children both now, and in the future to help build resilience (Gilligan, 2008).

The experiences and views of young people in this study correspond with the discussion by Bonell, Jamal., Melendez-Torrres & Cummins (2015) of the need for a dark logic model to identify potential unintended consequences of social initiatives. Within our study, some well-intentioned policy and practice initiatives were found to have the propensity to hinder evolving networks, relationships and relationality with peers. For example, efforts to encourage children's participation in meetings about their lives and holding them during the

school day, unintentionally disrupted education, separated them from peers and sometimes prompted uncomfortable questions from others. Well-meaning efforts to pay greater attention to the educational needs and progress of children and young people in care, were sometimes experienced as overbearing and stigmatising, compounding notions of difference and potentially creating further barriers to forging friendships and networks.

As well as the need to listen and involve children and young people in the development and implementation of initiatives designed to support their educational progress, the experiences of participants in this study highlighted a broad range of barriers that continue to blight the prospects of children and young people in care. Foremost, however, the findings of this study suggest that increased attention should be paid to young people's networks and relational needs. Whilst much has been written about with regards to relationships (Winter, 2015; Selwyn et al. 2018), it is often not the lens of policy makers and practitioners when guiding new initiatives or practice interventions.

Without consideration and facilitation of the relational, friendship and informal network needs and possibilities of children, it is difficult to see how social work and educational initiatives can be successfully implemented. Given 'the centrality of relationality is so easy to miss' (Mitchell, 2000 p. x), it is perhaps not surprising that policy makers and social work practitioners have not yet appreciated its significance. The experiences of participants in our study suggest that without commitment to ensure that relationships are seen as a basic right to be preserved (UNCRC, 1989) and that networks are supported to ensure relational needs are prioritised, it is unlikely that any targeted educational initiatives or efforts will have significant or sustained impact. We argue that drawing on the subjective knowledge base, strengths and capabilities of children and young people in care, and centralising them as experts in their needs, offers further valuable lessons in efforts to develop more effective policy and practice. This is necessary not only in remedying disparity in educational experience and attainment, but also as a mechanism to improve the subjective wellbeing and agency of care experienced young people more widely.

References

Aldgate, J., Colton, M., Ghate, D. & Heath, A. (1992) Educational attainment and stability in long-term foster care. *Children & Society* 6, 2, 91-103.

Alliance for Children in Care and Care leavers (2016) *Promoting Looked After Children's Emotional Well-being and Recovery from Trauma through a Child-centred Framework.* London, The Who Cares Trust

Bagnoli, A. & Clark, A. (2010) Focus groups with young people: a participatory approach to research planning. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 1, 101-119.

Bauman, Z. (2007) *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berger,L., Cancian,M., Han, J. & Rios-Salas, V. (2015) Children's academic achievement and foster care, *American Academy of Child Pediatrics*, 135, 1, 109-116

Berridge, D. (2012) Educating young people in care: What have we learned? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 6, 1171-1175.

Bonell, C., Jamal, F. Melendez-Torres, G.J. & Cummins, S. (2015) 'Dark logic': theorising the harmful consequences of public health interventions. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health,* 69, 95-98.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2, 77-101.

Briheim- Crockall, L., Michelmore,O. Baker, C., Oluwanifemi,O., Taylor, S. & Selwyn (2020) *What Makes Life Good? Care leavers views on wellbeing*. Oxford: Rees Centre.

Children's Commissioner for Wales (2017) *Hidden Ambitions: Achieving the Best for Young People Leaving Care*. Llansamlet: Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2nd edition) (2011) *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*. National Children's Bureau, London.

Clark, A. & Statham, J. (2005) Listening to young children: Experts in their own lives. *Adoption & Fostering* 29, 1, 45-56.

Community Care (2016) Foster Carers prevented from keeping in contact with children https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/02/03/foster-carers-children-prevented-keeping-contact-separation/

Conelly, G. & Furnivall, J. (2013) Addressing low attainment of children in public care: the Scottish experience, *European Journal of Social Work*, 16, 1, 88-104

Coram BAAF 2016. Statistics Wales WWW. http://corambaaf.org.uk/res/statwales Accessed 9.2.17

Davey, D. (2006) *Achievement and outcomes in education: a case study of the experience of young people looked after in residential and foster care in south Wales*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Cardiff University, Cardiff.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). (2010) Customer voice (wave 9): Aspirations of children in care, DFE-RBX-10-03, Department for Children, Schools and Families. Available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182283/DFE-RBX-10-03.pdf (accessed 18 March 2016).

Diaz, C. (2018) *A Study into Children and Young People's Participation in their Children in Care Reviews and the Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer*. PhD Thesis, Cardiff: Cardiff University.

Elliott, A. (2002) The educational expectations of looked after children, *Adoption and Fostering*, 26, 3, 58-68.

Evans, R., Brown, R., Rees, G & Smith, P. (2017) Systematic review of educational interventions for looked-after children and young people: Recommendations for intervention development and evaluation. *British Educational Research Journal* 43 ,1, 68-94

Ferguson, H. and Wolkow, K. (2012) Educating children and youth in care: a review of barriers to school progress and strategies for change, *Children and Youth Review*, 34, 6, 1143-1149

Fletcher-Campbell, F. & Hall, C. (1990) *Changing Schools? Changing People*. National Foundation for Educational Research, London.

Folgheraiter, F. (2004) *Relational Social Work: Toward Networking and Societal Practices,* London: Jessica Kingsley.

Folgheraiter, F. (2007) Relational social work: principles and practices, *Social Policy and Society*, 6, 2, 265-274.

Freedberg, S. (2009) *Relational Theory for Social Work Practice: A Feminist Perspective*, New York: Routledge.

Gabb, J., & Fink, J. (2015) Telling moments and everyday experience: mixed methods research on couple relationships and everyday lives. *Sociology*, 49, 5, 970-987

Gabb, J. & Singh, R. The Uses of Emotion Maps in Research and Clinical Practice with Families and Couples: Methodological Innovation and Critical Inquiry. *Family Process* 54 ,1, 185-197.

Gilligan, R. (2008) Promoting resilience in young people in long-term care: The relevance of roles and relationships in the domains of recreation and work, *Journal of Social Work*, 22, 1, 37-50.

Girling, R. 2019. Yet another change: The experience of movement for children and young people looked after. In D. Mannay, A. Rees, and L. Roberts, (Eds), *Children and Young People 'looked after'? Education, Intervention and the Everyday Culture of Care in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 127-139.

Hewett, R., Douglas, G. & Keil, S. (2015) *Well-being of Young People with Visual Impairments*, Birmingham: Birmingham University.

Holland, S. (2009) Listening to children in care: a review of methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding looked after children's perspectives. *Children and Society,* 23, 3, 226-235.

Holland, S. (2010) Looked after children and the ethic of care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 6, 1664-1680.

Honey, K. L., Rees, P. & Griffley, S. (2011) Investigating self-perceptions and resilience in looked after children. Educational Psychology in Practice, *Theory, Research and Practice in Educational Psychology*, 27 (1) 37-52.

Höjer, I., Lindberg, H., Nielsen, B., Gustafsson, J. and Johansson, H. 2018 Recognition of education and schooling in case files for children and young people placed in out-of-home care, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 93, pp. 135-142, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.06.042.

Hussein, S., M. Stevens, J. Manthorpe, & J. Moriarty. 2011. 'Change and Continuity: A Quantitative Investigation of Trends and Characteristics of International Social Workers in England'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41,6, 1140–57.

Jackson, S. (2010) Reconnecting care and education: from the Children Act 1989 to Care Matters. *Journal of Children's Services*, 5, 3, 48–60.

Jackson, S. & Cameron, C. (2014) *Improving Access to Higher Education for Young People in Public Care. European Policy and Practice*. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Jackson, S. & Martin, P. (1998) 'Surviving the care system: education and resilience'. *Journal of Adolesence*, 21, 569-583.

Jackson, S. & Höjer, I. (2013) Prioritising education for children looked after away from home. *European Journal of Social Work*, 16, 1, 1-5.

Johnson, G. A., Pfister, E. A, and Vindrola-Padros, C. (2012) Drawings, Photos, and Performances: Using Visual Methods with Children', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 28(2), pp. 164–77.

Jones, R., Everson-Hock, ES, Papaioannou, D., Guillaume, I., Goyder, E., Chilcott, J., Cooke, J., Payne, N., Duernas, A., Sheppard, L.M., & Swann, C. (2011) Factors associated with

outcomes for looked-after children and young people: a correlates review of the literature. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 37, 5, 613-622.

Kahan, B. (1979) *Growing up in Care*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Kitzinger, J. & Barbour, R. (1999) The challenge and promise of focus groups. In *Developing Focus Group Research: Policy, Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE.

Kääriälä, A., Haapakorva, P., Pekkarinen, E. and Sund, R. 2019. From care to education and work? Education and employment trajectories in early adulthood by children in out-of-home care, Child Abuse & Neglect, 98, 104144, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104144.

Kools, S. M. (1997) Adolescent identity development in foster care. *Family Relations* 46, 263-271.

Lushey, C. & Munro, E. R. (2015) Participatory peer research methodology: An effective method for obtaining young people's perspectives on transitions from care to adulthood. *Qualitative Social Work*, 14, 4, 522–537.

Mannay, D., Rees, A. and Roberts, L. (Eds.) 2019. *Children and Young People 'looked after'? Education, Intervention and the Everyday Culture of Care in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Mannay, D. (2010) Making the familiar strange: Can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible? *Qualitative Research* 10(1), pp. 91-111

Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, S., Rees, A., Evans, R. & Andrews, D. (2015) *Understanding the Educational Experiences and Opinions, Attainment, Achievement and Aspirations of Looked After Children in Wales,* Available at :http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/151111-understanding-educational-experiences-opinions-looked-after-childrern-en.pdf)

Mannay, D, Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A. & Andrews, D. (2017) The consequences of being labelled 'looked-after': Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales. *British Educational Research Journal* 43(4), pp. 683-699 (a)

Mannay, D., Staples, E. and Edwards, V. (2017) Visual methodologies, sand and psychoanalysis: employing creative participatory techniques to explore the educational experiences of mature students and children in care. *Visual Studies* 32(4), pp. 345-358 (b)

Martin, P.Y. & Jackson, S. (2002) Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 7, 121-130.

Mason, J. & Danby, S. (2011) Children as experts in their own lives; child inclusive research, *Child Indicators Research*, 4, 2, 185-189

McMurray, I., Connolly, H., Preston-Shoot, M. & Wigley, V (2011) Shards of the Old Looking Glass. Restoring the Significance of Identity In Promoting Positive Outcomes For Looked After Children. *Child & Family Social Work*. Vol 16 (2) 210-218

McNamara, P., Montserrat, C. and Wise, S. (Eds). 2019. *Education in Out-of-Home Care: International Perspectives on Policy, Practice and Research*. New York: Springer

Mitchell, S. (2000) *Relationality: From Attachment to Inter-subjectivity*, New York: Psychology Press.

NICE 2016 https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26/chapter/childrens-attachment-implementation-getting-started (Accessed 25.9.17)

O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J. & Luke, N. (2015) *What is the Relationship between Being in Care and the Educational Outcomes of Children? An International Systematic Rev*iew. Oxford: The Rees Centre

O'Kane, C, (2008) The development of participatory techniques: Facilitating children's views about decisions which affect them', in P. M. Christensen and A. James (eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. London, Routledge, pp. 125-155

O' Sullivan, A. & Westerman, R. (2007) Closing the gap: Investigating the barriers to educational achievement for looked after children. *Adoption and Fostering,* 31, 1, 13-20.

Page, R. & Clark, G. (1997) *Who cares? Young People in Care Speak Out*. National Children's Bureau, London.

Pecora, P. J. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 6, 1121-1129.

Pithouse, A. J. and Rees, A. (2011) Care as regulated and care in the obdurate world of intimate relations: Foster care divided?. *Ethics and Social Welfare* 5, 2, 196-209

Prout, A. (2003) Participation, policy and the changing conditions of childhood. In: Hallett, C. and Prout, A. (eds) *Hearing the Voices of Children: Social Policy for a New Century*. Routledge Falmer, London.

Pye, J. and Rees, P. (2019) Factors that promote positive supervised birth family contact for children in care. In D. Mannay, A. Rees & L. Roberts (eds) *Children and Young People Looked After? Education, Intervention and the everyday culture of care in Wales*. Cardiff University Press: Cardiff. pp. 113-126.

Rock, S., Michelson, D., Thomson, S. & Day, C. 2013. Understanding Foster Placement Instability for Looked After Children: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence. *British Journal of Social Work*, Advance Access published June 21, 2013.

Ryan, M. (2012) *How to Make Relationships Matter for Looked After Young People*, London: National Children's Bureau.

Saldanha, K. &Nybell, L. (2016) Capturing/captured by stories of marginalized young people: Direct scribing and dialogic narrative analysis. *Qualitative Social Work* . Published online June 29, 2016

Seale, C. (2012) Coding and analysing data. In: Seale, C. Ed. Researching Society and Culture. 3rd Ed. London: Sage, pp 305-323.

Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas S., & O'Higgins, A. (2015) The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data. [Online]. Available at: http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenOverviewReport_Nov2015.pdf

Schlerr, T. (2007) Educational experiences of children in foster care meta-analyses of special education, retention and discipline rates, *School Psychology International,* 8, 4, 419-436

Selwn, J. Magnus, L., Symonds, J. & Briheim- Crockall, L. (2018) *Our Lives, Our care Wales; Looked after children views on their wellbeing,* Bristol: University of Brostol Press

Silverman, D. (2013) *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, London, Sage

Sinclair, I. & Gibbs, I. (1998) *Children's Homes: a Study in Diversity*. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Staples, E., Roberts, L., Lyttleton-Smith, J. and Hallett, S. 2019. Enabling care-experienced young people's participation in research: CASCADE Voices. In D. Mannay, A. Rees and L. Roberts (Eds.), Children and young people 'looked after'? *Education, Intervention and the Everyday Culture of Care in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 196–209.

Stein, M. (2012) *Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood*. Jessica Kingsley, London.

Stein, M. & Verweijen-Slamnescu, R. (2012) *When Care Ends: Lessons from Peer Research.* SOS Children's Villages: Austria.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, London, Sage

Tew, J. (2013) Recovery capital: what enables a sustainable recovery from mental health difficulties, *European Journal of Social Work*, 16, 3, 360-374.

Tronto, , J.K. (1994) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. London: Routledge.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Wales Audit Office. (2012) The educational attainment of looked after children and young people: [Online]. Available at http://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/The_educational_attainment_of_looked_after_children_and_young_people_English_2012.pdf [Accessed: 2 August 2015].

Welsh Assembly Government (2004) Children and Young People: Rights to Action http://www.assembly.wales/Committee%20Documents/HSS(2)-02- -English.pdf

Welsh Assembly Government. (2007) Towards a stable life and a brighter future. Welsh Assembly Government. [Online]. Available at: http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/publications/110317stableen.pdf [Accessed: 31 August 2017].

Welsh Government (2016) Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales. WWW. http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160127-lac-strategy-en.pdf Accessed 9.2.17

Welsh Government (2017) Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: One year on. http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170509-looked-after-children-en.pdf

Welbourne, P. & Leeson, C. (2012) The education of children in care: a research review. *Journal of Children's Services,* 7, 2, 128 – 143.

Williams, F. (2004) *Re-thinking Families,* London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Winter, K. (2015) *Insights: Supporting positive relationships for children and young people who have care experience.* Glasgow: Institute of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences.