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Kendrick, Andrew (2009) *Residential child care and offending*. In: SIRCC National Conference: Seeing the whole picture: Working in partnership to enhance the lives of children looked after away from home, 2009-06-11 - 2009-06-12, Crieff. (Unpublished)

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# Seeing the Whole Picture



**Working in  
Partnership to  
Enhance the Lives of  
Children Looked After  
Away from Home**



# Residential Child Care and Offending



## Andy Kendrick



- Residential child care as criminalising experience
  - role of other young people
  - role of staff
- Residential child care is used as a resource for significant proportion of young offenders
  - questions of effectiveness

- Many of the risk factors associated with offending behaviour also associated with being looked after
    - socio-economic deprivation
    - adverse housing conditions
    - broken homes and separation
    - poor parental supervision and discipline
    - family conflict
    - educational disadvantage
- (Kendrick, 2005)

# Reasons for placement

- Often different ways of categorising reasons for placement but offending/behaviour accounts for significant proportion of placements in residential care

Three main groupings of stress factors leading to accommodation were identified: behavioural problems, abuse and neglect, and, slightly less noticeably, inadequate care and relationship problems. Most children had multiple problems and had experienced severe difficulties in several aspects of their lives.... It therefore appears that the current children's home population is much more complex and problematic than in 1985. The proportion posing behavioural problems prior to entry has more than doubled

(Berridge and Brodie, 1998)

# Reasons for secure care

Reason	Male	Female	No (%)
Danger to self	20	27	47 (89%)
Likely to abscond	17	22	39 (73%)
Danger to others	13	5	18 (34%)
Persistent offending	6	0	6 (11%)
Serious offence(s)	2	0	2 (4%)
Total	25	28	53 (100%)

- Peer pressure and the development of deviant sub-cultures is a major difficulty for residential care
    - fitting in
    - taking on board other people's problems
    - lack of boundaries
    - lack of staff continuity
- (Taylor, 2006)



*Because I wouldn't be mixing with the environment what I was mixing with in care... going out robbing people, taking drugs and that, sniffing gas and that. I didn't have a clue about any of that until the kid's home. People showed me things like that and I didn't have a clue (Gemma, 18)*

*My criminal record is through care, for assaulting staff. I've got nowt else on my record apart from that one charge... if I'd have flicked me fingers and it accidentally caught them it was assault, do you know what I mean (Donna, 16)*

(Taylor, 2006)

## • Temptations and pressures

- Bullied (before – 41%, during – 44%)
- offered cannabis (before – 43%, during – 39%)
- offered heroin/cocaine (before – 12%, during – 7%)
- encourage to get drunk (before – 44%, during 48%)
- Encouraged to steal (before – 38%, during – 31 %)
  
- only one in nine said they had been offered drugs that they had not been offered before
- one in eight encouraged to get drunk but not before
- Only one in nine encouraged to steal since their arrival and for first time

(Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998)

# Residential care as criminalising experience

- There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that young people in children's homes are more likely to be prosecuted for relatively minor offences, such as damage to property, carried out within the home. If these young people had been living in their own families, it is likely that this behaviour would be dealt with in a very different way.

(NACRO 2003)

# Police involvement

Interviews with residential staff suggested that police involvement in residential care homes can vary according to:

- Differing staff thresholds/tolerance levels
- Level of staff experience
- Individual relationships between young people and staff;
- Group dynamics;
- Individual personalities and backgrounds of the young people at any given time
- Relationships with the local police
- Organisational ethos and management styles

(Paul 2008)

# Residential care as criminalizing experience



- Police called in to resolve situations which would not have led to criminal charges in other contexts (Darker et al, 2008)
  - Staff poorly qualified and ill-equipped to deal with conflict
- Overall, this study shows no evidence that care itself promotes offending behaviour. However, it does suggest that the services provided in local authority care are not always sufficient to succeed in helping young people overcome deep-seated and long-standing difficulties which they have already begun to experience before entry (Darker et al, 2008)

## Study of persistent young offenders

- One quarter of those identified as persistent offenders were living in some form of residential establishment
- 13% of offences referred to Reporter... were perpetrated in a residential establishment (47% assault, 29% breach of peace)... Of the sample members who had resided in a residential establishment during this period 86% had perpetrated an offence in such an establishment.
- ... For a small but notable proportion of the sample (8%), over half of their qualifying offending took place in a residential establishment. At least one child entered Fast Track as a result of offences which all occurred in a residential establishment.

(SCRA 2006)

- A recent review and meta-analysis of research on residential child care concludes that children and young people, on average, improve in their psychosocial functioning (Knorth *et al*, 2008)
- The limited research on residential child care also found that generally children did better following time in residential care than they were doing beforehand (Forrester, 2008)

## Focus on:

- clear strategies
- social skills/ social competence
- family focused work
- behaviour modification programmes
- after care and ‘step down’ approaches



- Use of restorative justice in residential child care is relatively recent development
- Resolution of
  - Criminal damage
  - Dispute/assault on staff
  - Dispute/assault on other residents
- Main types of restorative practice
  - Restorative conferencing
  - Informal restorative discussions or meetings
  - Individual restorative discussions

(Willmott 2007)

# Effectiveness of restorative justice

- Limited research and evaluation
- Decrease in number of police call outs
- Decrease in use of restraint
- Empowering for staff and young people

(Willmott 2007)

# Centrality of relationships

- Several of the studies of residential homes explained successful residential care according to the quality of the interaction between young people and adults. Terms used include: empathy; approachability; persistence; willingness to listen and reliability (Berridge, 2002)
- ... role that offender supervision may play in supporting desistance... studies underline the importance of strong relationships between offenders and their supervisors, characterised by mutual respect, loyalty and commitment... also requires striving to develop the offender's strengths - at both the individual and a social network level (McNeill, 2009)

- Establishing positive relationships with range of key partners: education, social workers, police, health professionals
- Close collaboration with police includes developing protocol for reporting offending
- Joint training
- Communication and the exchange of knowledge
- Importantly, partners must visit and and work inside the homes in order to meet young people, understand the issues they face and gain insights into the reasons for their challenging behaviour

(Home Office 2004)

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