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To establish the views of residential care workers and what they perceive to be the key factors that hold back some of the young people in their care in the achievement of their educational goals?

A qualitative study

Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Statement of ownership

Appendix 1 Interview transcript

Appendix 2 Ethics application

Appendix 3 University of Chester Ethical approval letter

Appendix 4 Participant information sheet

Appendix 5 Participant consent form

Appendix 6 Copy of research proposal

Word Count: 15, 435

Abstract

Aim: To investigate the views and experiences of residential care workers and establish what factors they believe help and hinder educational achievement of young people in their care.

Background: National and local policy on children in care is based mainly on children in care quantitative research. It is important that qualitative research is undertaken on the subject and the views of residential care workers are sought so that people who support young people with their education can be educated about what helps and hinders educational achievement of young people in care. The disparity between the achievements of looked after children and their peers remains unacceptably wide. There is evidence in some children's homes that insufficient priority is given to education, for example some young people are not attending school regularly. (Ofsted 2008-2009) For these reasons and more it is significant that more focus should be on those who provide the day to day care for looked after children, this is why it is vital to gain an insight into the perspectives of residential care workers to establish what factors influence the educational outcomes of children in care.

Method: Six residential care workers were interviewed using semi structured interviews. Participants were asked for their views on what hinders and helps educational achievement and what they believe can support children in residential care. These data were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis.

Findings: Participants shared their experiences and identified areas where young people struggle the most, also reflecting on the positive aspects in terms of support. There was a mixture of experiences and both positive and negative attitudes.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that some children in residential care do not always achieve their educational goals. This is because of a number of factors that impact on their lives; these include early childhood loss or trauma. However in ascertaining the views of the care workers this has offered an insight into how young people can be supported so they are enabled to reach their full potential. The study also contributes to the knowledge of what works well in helping young people in care to reach their educational goals. It is an ongoing process of engaging the young people with positive activities and to promote educational learning. It appears that the care staff interviewed was able to reflect on their experiences and on this process. Hopefully the findings can contribute to research already undertaken on this subject and help inform other professionals on how they can contribute to supporting young people in care in their educational journey and good practice for this group.

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I am also grateful to the children's service provider who allowed me to conduct the interviews within the children's homes. I would like to thank the team leaders who helped me recruit the participants for the study.

I would also like to thank the participants that took part in the study and allowed me to interview them.

Statement of ownership

 "I certify

"The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course,"

Signed.."

Date................................

1. Introduction:

The research project is a small scale study that investigates the perceptions of residential care staff of what they believe impacts upon the educational outcomes for young people in residential care on the Wirral. The idea for the proposal stems from the researchers previous experience of working with looked after children as the home school attendance officer for children in care. The researcher's interest in this area continued to grow as a result of being employed as a residential bank worker in various children's homes whilst training to qualify as a social worker. The researcher has now qualified and is a practising social worker employed by Wirral Borough Council's Children and Young Persons Department.

This study is important and necessary as there is very little in the research investigating the views and perceptions of residential care workers and the reasons they believe so many children in public care have poor educational outcomes. The researcher proposes to elicit the views of residential care workers in the Wirral and what they believe the main reasons are that hold back young people from achieving in their education. These workers are front line and essentially these workers have a 'caregiver' role and have a duty under the Children Act 1989 and 2004, (Brammer, 2007) to promote and safeguard these young people ensuring that they reach their full potential. This is significant as residential workers are key people in the lives of young people in care and act as a 'corporate parent'. Therefore it is important to identify these barriers and put systems in place to overcome pitfalls and work towards improving academic achievement for these young people. It is also paramount to highlight good practice in care homes and to recognise what works well, such as the positive promotion of education and regular school attendance.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 / 2010 places statutory guidance on how local authorities should implement the duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This can be seen in the context of the 'Every Child Matters' 2003[i], change for children programme, which aims to improve outcomes for all children and in the Children Act 1989 and 2004. (Brammer 2007) If there are so many policies and guidance to promote positive outcomes for looked after young people then why are so many failing their education?

Residential Care workers provide the day to day care and support that looked after children require so that they can attend school and reach their full potential. It is useful that this research is done so that residential care workers can have their say and also so that other people involved with the young people can be educated about the reasons why so many children in residential care fail in their education. There is an abundance of research into the views and experiences of children in care, (Harker 2004 and Martin 2002) however, evidence about residential carers experience is more limited; there is no identifiable research in the Local Authority in question. Therefore, it is important that their contribution is also viewed in the context of what is known more widely about good practice in supportive placements. (C4EO 2009) It is important to listen to people's perspectives and experiences so that strategies can be put in place to improve ways of working so that young people's individual needs are met and that they are being 'cared' for and not just 'looked after'. (Hugh 2009) It is important that the researcher gains an insight into the perspectives given by the residential care workers as essentially they have a care giver role and have a duty under the Children Act (1989) and (2004) to promote educational achievement and ensure that the young people in their care reach the

governments '5 outcomes' under the Every Child Matters Agenda 2003. (Brammer 2007)

There are currently 383 'looked after children in the Local Authority. (Wirral Virtual School 2010) Wirral Local Authorities Children and Young Person's Plan (2008-2011) aims to reduce the gap in attainment and improve prospects for looked after children. The Joint Guidance Education of young people 'looked after' by the Local Authority (DfEE/DOH 2000) identified the need for better integrated planning of both care and education, this was addressed by introducing Designated Teachers (DT) in every school and an individual Personal Education Plan (PEP) for children in care. However, there is still a long way to go as attendance and attainment remains a problem, as the 2008/09 OC2[ii] figures show that 12.53 per cent out of 383 of looked after children missed 25 days or more of education. (Wirral Virtual School 2010) There is a massive gap between the attainment of children looked after by local authorities and their peers, only 6 per cent achieve 5 or more GCSE[iii] subjects at grades A*- C as opposed to 53 per cent of all children. (DfES 2010) A shocking 43 per cent of looked after children leave school with no GCSE qualifications in comparison to only 5 per cent of non-looked after children. (DfES 2010)

This research is needed as education failure is the root of many social problems and children's homes are seen as being responsible for a series of poor outcomes among former residents, including unemployment (Biehal et al., 1995), homelessness, (Yates 1995) and 'teenage pregnancies' (Garnett 1992) Children who grow up in local authority care, 'looked after' under the Children Act 1989, are 50 times more likely to wind up in prison and 66 times more likely to have children needing public care. (Jackson & Simon 2005) The educational achievement of young people leaving residential care is crucial because of its impact on their future life

opportunities. (Cheung 1994 and Jackson & Martin1998) Looked after children, especially those in residential care are arguably the most in need of realistic and well planned education provision. (Hayden 2005)

The projects findings and recommendations will hopefully contribute to the knowledge of educational outcomes for children in residential care and highlight what will help to improve life chances. As Shaw (2007) states, good research in social work will aim to promote justice, social change and social inclusion.

Aims and objectives:

Aims:

To investigate the educational outcomes of young people in residential care homes in the chosen Local Authority and identify the key factors that hinder and help young people in their academic achievement.

Objectives:

- To provide an in-depth perspective of residential care workers, examining the educational background of children in care.
- To explore what they believe to be the main reasons why some young people in their care fail to achieve in their educational outcomes and to establish key areas of success and why some young people in care do achieve positive outcomes.
- To establish what needs to be put in place to help the young people and to highlight good practice in care homes and identify what works well.
- To contribute to the understanding of how being in care influences young people's future life chances.

The researcher plans to undertake a small scale qualitative study. The researcher believes a qualitative approach is the appropriate and relevant way to enable her to gather the personal views and perceptions from the residential care workers as to why some of the young people in their care fail to achieve in their educational goals. It is important to promote and share good practice so that young people in residential care have equal opportunities. It is essential to identify and overcome any barriers that are preventing young people in care from achieving well academically and so

that systems can be put in place to overcome pitfalls. It is important to listen to residential care workers perspectives and experiences so that young people's individual needs are met and that they have the assistance required so that deeper understanding of their educational needs can be developed. (Hugh 2009)

The paradigm the researcher is using is an interpretive approach as its epistemological assumptions of knowledge arises from interpretation and insight and it is grounded in empathetic communication with the subjects of the research. (D'Cruz & Jones 2004) This approach is appropriate as the researcher wants to get as much information as possible from the residential care workers. As, Sarantakos (1998) argues, 'each method is used where and when it proves the most suited and the best way to obtain the information required.' Qualitative research is also described as more in depth and therefore better when analysing emotions and experiences. Qualitative methods are also far more flexible and allow the researcher to change and develop the methods employed. (Smith 2009)

2. Literature Review

The researcher has drawn on existing literature, previous research, policy documents and theoretical work that have already been undertaken on the subject, specifically focusing around the key factors that both help and hinder academic achievement. Published, unpublished and grey literature on the topic was uncovered during the search. The literature was then reviewed, evaluated and critically appraised by the researcher. Due consideration was given the strengths as well as the limitations of the research literature, the theoretical perspectives given and any ethical issues that there may have been. There is a lot of research into the views and experiences of children in care. (Martin 2002 & Harker 2004) However, evidence about care workers experiences is more limited and there is a little identifiable research in this area at a local level. Therefore, it is important that residential care workers views and contributions are also viewed in the context of what is known more widely about good practice in supportive placements. (C4EO 2009) There is little research in the chosen local authority and on the views of residential care workers in relation to educational outcomes of children in residential care. From the research and information available in this area it is clear that children who are or have been in the care system have been marginalised and isolated for too long.

The structure of the literature review will consist of an overview of existing literature followed by a number of key themes that were identified during the literature review. Then the literature will be analysed using a thematic approach (Smith 2009) each theme will be discussed and critically appraised in some detail, as will the literature found relating to each theme.

Overview of existing literature:

Research over the last twenty years has consistently shown that children in public care fall behind at school, seldom achieve good qualifications and are much less likely than their peers to go on to further education. (Martin & Jackson 2002) Poor educational outcomes of looked after children has been noted for decades. (Ferguson 1966 & Jackson 1987) The number of children and young people in the care population is falling but the levels and complexities of the needs of those within it continue to rise. (Berridge & Brodie 1998) Addressing the educational underachievement of looked after children continues to be a major government priority and local authorities have been charged with 'substantially narrowing the gap between the educational attainment and participation of children in care and their peers. (Smith 2003) Despite these failings being identified children in care continue to underachieve in comparison to non-looked after children. The C4EO is published research that is critical as it provides a more comprehensive picture of the poor achievement of children in residential care in the form of statistics. These show that in 2009 only 13.5 % of looked after children in England achieved 5 A*-C grades in both English and Maths in comparison to 48.5 % of non-looked after children. (C4EO 2009) If children's homes are to meet the increasing expectations that are being made of them, national and local government will have to undertake a radical transformation of residential child care, especially in terms of attitudes towards, and resources invested in this sector. (Gallagher et al., 2004) Despite increased legislation and reforms young people continue to experience obstacles as they leave care and begin their journey to Education Employment and Training (EET) Only 1% of care leavers attend University in comparison to 38% of the wider population. (Jackson et al., 2003)

The literature also highlights that a high number of Looked after children have additional needs and make up a significant proportion of most educational psychologists' workloads, a total of 27 per cent have statements of specialist educational need, (SEN), compared with 3 per cent of all children. (Jackson & McParlin 2006) Early research claimed that poor school performance and problematic behaviour could be attributed to the extremely disadvantaged families from which most children in care originate. (St Claire & Osborn 1987) Also, that the majority have experienced neglect or abuse, or both, before coming into care. (Heath at al., 1989) These experiences can impact directly upon a child's development and their ability to learn. It is recognised that children who struggle to attain the level that is expected of them can lead to them becoming disaffected with the institution. (Cowie at al. 2004 & Malcom et al. 1996 cited in Zhang 2007) It is vital that support is available to meet these needs and "regular school attendance is essential if young people are to make the most of educational achievements available to them". (MBW 1998) Overall government initiatives that take a more positive approach to raising the educational attainment of children in care are very welcome and are beginning to make some impression on outcomes. (Jackson & McParlin 2006)

So what can help overcome these difficulties? It is clear from the literature that obtaining effective support, encouragement and acknowledgement of their efforts is central to educational success. (Harker et al. 2004) The most frequent advice from a group of high achievers in the *Educational Success for Children in Public Care* (2004), emphasised the necessity for a child to receive positive encouragement from significant others. 74 per cent of young people from the sample stressed the vital importance of residential carers, foster carers and parents showing an active interest

in their education and giving them support and encouragement to do well. (Martin & Jackson 2002)

The main factors that hinder educational attainment were published in the Government's Social Exclusion Unit Report (2003) *'A Better Education for Children in Care'.* The three main causes of under achievement of 'looked after' children identified are that:

- Services are failing to meet the needs of looked after children.

- Their lives are characterised by instability.

- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education.

The researcher is going to review and analyse these three factors in more detail, using a thematic approach, then look at other research on the subject and identify more key factors that hinder looked after children in achieving their educational goals following a thematic approach.

Literature Review- A thematic approach to the literature:

- *Services are failing to meet the needs of looked after children:*

Jackson's study in (1987) put the education of children in care into the public sphere and forced the government to recognise the failings of services such as social services and educational services to meet the needs of these children, they acknowledged that something needed to be done. It has long been recognised that the poor educational experience of children in care is attributable in part to the fact that poor educational experience falls into an uncertain zone between two major bureaucracies of social work and education. (Borland et al, 1998) The Audit

Commission (1994) and the Social Services Inspectorate / Office for Standards in Education (1995) also highlight that there was limited communication and co-ordination between education and social services departments, that hindered effective planning and monitoring of looked after children's education. *'The Education of Children in Care'* article in The Psychologist (2006) by Jackson & McParlin, also state that the generally poor outcomes for people who have spent time in care as children can be confidently linked to educational failure and that the care and education systems must bear a heavy responsibility for this.

- *Their lives are characterised by instability*

There are questions as to whether or not the amounts of school placements children in care have a negative impact on their educational learning. It is thought that the fewer moves a child have, the more likely they are to be successful with their education. (Harker 2004) Andrew Kendrick (1998), '*Education and Residential Care Review*' highlights these issues and stresses the effects of disruption and harm caused to children and young people by multiple care placements and changes in educational provision. The educational achievement of young people is crucial because of its impact on their future life opportunities. (Cheung & Heath 1994) One of the factors which have been identified as associated with resilience is positive educational experience. Borland et al (1998) & Gilligan (1998) agree that positive experiences at school can minimise the effects of adversity and school can be a source of stability when everything else is uncertain.

- *They have unmet, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education.*

There needs to be greater understanding of the needs of children in care and how if these needs have not been met the impact that this may have on a child's behaviour and ability to learn. If considering Maslow's (1970) claim that the importance of satisfying physical, emotional and social needs before individuals can concentrate on intellectual matters has long been recognised. These needs have to be met before a person can move on to the next stage, it is about establishing stability and consistency in a chaotic world. Cowie et al., (2004) suggests that a pupil needs to evolve through these stages before they can achieve their full potential at school; if these are unmet, they argue it would be impossible for them to benefit from a learning environment. In analysing the situation as the child being a person suffering with a problem, rather than being the problem, caused by internal, personal and external societal causes of difficulty would allow for a more holistic approach to understand and intervening with difficulties. (Wilson et al. 2008) It is essential that young people in care are supported and not overlooked. Evans (2000) found that looked after children were 13 times more likely than others to have a statement of special educational needs. Many schools have acknowledged that they have not understood the problems that these children face and they have not been equipped to deal with them. (Jackson & Martin 2002) Another issues is unmet mental health needs, "Around 45 per cent of looked after children in Britain are assessed as having a mental health disorder – four to five times higher than for children living in private households. (Meltzer *et al* 2003)

- *Low expectations and stereotypes*

'Educational Success for Children in Public Care: advice from a group of high achievers' by Sonia Jackson and Pearl Martin (2002) examines 38 high achieving young people who spent at least one year in residential care. A third of the young people interviewed believed that negative stereotypes and low expectations were major obstacles to their educational success. Many of the participants remarked on the lack of interest in education among staff in the care home where they had lived. Many talked about the negative effects, "of being 'singled out' by teachers and the stigma and shame of being in care." (Jackson & Martin 2002) Assumptions and expectations are often that children will have poor levels of academic achievement. (Berridge et al., 1998) These negative views could lead to the young person having difficulty establishing a sense of identity, also causing difficulty in developing a sense of trust, affecting ones' self belief and sense of 'self'. (Wilson et al., 2008)

- *Pre-care experiences*

'The Education of Children in Care' article in The Psychologist (2006) by Jackson & McParlin, identified that pre-care experiences play a part in depressing attainment, but so does the failure to address the aftermath of such experiences of the impact of separation when children are removed from their families. Some of these children may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder that has a tendency to erupt when they are in confined situations such as class rooms. (Cairns 1999) Attachment has long been seen as significant in children's development. A child needs to develop a sense of self and a sense of security, so need to establish a secure attachment figure. (Frederick and Goddard 2008) Howe et al. (1999) argue poor quality close relationships can be a contributory cause to problematic issues in

children's development. (Cited in Frederick & Goddard 2008) Erikson's theory on identity formation suggests that a fundamental key factor to establishing a secure personal identity lies in the successful interactions that an individual has with family, peers, school and the wider community. (Wilson et al. 2008)

Hugh (2009) states that there are a wide variety of problems arising from the children's previous experiences of life in chaotic and neglectful households, and the uncertainties and disappointments associated with being in care. However it is more difficult to explain the underperformance of looked after children at school. One piece of research that does throw some light on this is the five year study of university students with a care background. Jackson (2005), the *'By Degrees'* project, tracked three successive cohorts of university entrants through their degree courses. Detailed questions were asked about their families' origin and pre-care experiences as well as about care placements and education. Sixty per cent had come into care as a result of severe neglect or abuse; other factors were parental substance misuse, mental illness and domestic violence.

Factors that help:

- *Encouragement and praise:*

In the article*, 'Educational Success for Children in Public Care: advice from a group of high achievers'* by Sonia Jackson and Pearl Martin (2002) The most frequent advice given by the sample was for a child to receive positive encouragement from significant others. Seventy-four per cent stressed the importance of residential carers showing an active interest in their education and giving them support and encouragement to do well. Nearly everyone stressed the importance of 'normalisation' in children's day to day lives. Basically they wanted to be treated the

same as other people, not standing out amongst their peers as different or peculiar. The Children Act 1989 guidance stresses that looked after children are encouraged to have high expectations of themselves and to be encouraged to reach their full potential. (McGowan 2009) Ofsted (2008-2009) Report on Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children states that professionals should set and maintain high aspirations for young people and no limit should be imposed on the capacity of children, young people and learners to improve, develop and achieve.

- *Government initiatives*

In an attempt to overcome these issues and improve outcomes for children in care the government continued to introduce new policies and initiatives such as Personal Educational Plans (PEP). Donna Hugh (2009) examines whether or not personal educational plans improve their educational prospects? In the journal '*The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children in England*'. The PEP is aimed at encouraging multi-agency working, implementing plans and encouraging services to work effectively together. PEP's enable provisions such as catch up support, transition support and out of hours learning activities for all looked after children. Hayden (2005) found that the PEP has raised the profile of the educational needs of children and that the government's political investment in the PEP has ensured that education stays high on the agenda for all involved in the care of the child.

Driscoll (2011) argues that initiatives like granting looked after children preferential access to the best schools (School Admissions (Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2008), and the avoidance of placement moves in Years 10 and 11(age 15–16) save in exceptional circumstances, should contribute to further educational

progress. The most recent initiatives to address the poorer life chances of looked after children in England and Wales were set out in the *Care Matters* agenda (DfES 2006/2007) which gave rise to the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. This legislation is intended to strengthen further the duties owed by local authorities to young adults leaving their care. It extended the time during which young people are entitled to assistance from their former corporate parent, with particular regard to support for those continuing in education and training. (Driscoll 2011)

- *Provision of educational placements*

Jackson (1987) found that for many looked after children school can often at best be experienced with mixed feelings. School can be a place where encouragement and hope co-exist. Horner and Krawczyk (2006) found that good schooling can play an important role in assisting and promoting resilience and in developing their full potential. Ofsted (2008-2009) recommends that a clear and consistent focus on education is vital. This involves rigorous tracking of looked after children's progress and holding schools to account for it. It is also important to promote regular dialogue between schools and carers.

- *Develop a learning culture / inculcate children with sense of value for education*

The British Journal of Social Work (2004), '*Good Practice in Education of Children in Residential Care'*, by Bernard Gallagher shares good practice in children's homes. It was evident that care staff in the study emphasised the importance of education to the young people and this was explained and discussed with the young people in the home. It was clear that education was valued and the carers regularly spoke to young people about its potential to have a positive influence on their lives and future

life chances. "The children were given clear and consistent messages what was required of them in terms of their own education and future aspirations." Gallagher (2004) The message was clear; this level of investment was worthwhile because education was worthwhile. Kent (1997) claims that residential care staff should, "put efforts into ensuring that children obtain the best education they can. They need to be involved in children's schooling and provide a supportive educational environment."

- *Contact with families*

The Children Act 1989 emphasises the importance of maintaining contact between a child and their family members unless this is contrary to the child's interests. (Timms & Thorburn 2006). Looked after children say that they want to stay in contact with their family members and friends of their choice and to 'make sense' of these sometimes difficult relationships. (C4EO 2009)

- *Listening to young people & encourage participation:*

A report on the '*Educational Outcomes of Looked After Children*', by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Service (C4EO 2009) highlights that listening to young people and implementing what they say can produce significant improvements in provision. For example, high proportions of children and young people interviewed in the study believe that being looked after has benefited their education but overall they identify high unevenness within their journeys through care, in their planning developing, commissioning and providing services can suggest where and how to improve. Research involving young people is an important means by which to engage their participation rights under the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is especially significant in relation to marginalised groups. (Wigfall and Cameron 2006)

- *Provide training for care workers*

An example of good practice in this area can be seen in the '*Holding the Space Programme'* it is a multi-model intervention delivered in residential care settings for looked after children who have experienced sexual and emotional abuse. The intervention regards behaviour as symptomatic of underlying issues resulting from trauma and it includes training staff in person centred approaches using therapeutic, art and personal therapies. Children and young people reported that they feel listened to and cared for since the programme has been introduced. The use of both individual and group approaches is reported to provide a safe space where both staff and young people can reflect on their emotions, behaviour and how they are communicating. Ofsted (2000) *Raising Achievement for Children in Public Care* report recommends the need for some joint training with teachers and social workers, in order to raise the care workers knowledge of the education system and the needs of looked after children.

- *More understanding and knowledge of children's needs*

We need more knowledge about the complex learning and emotional needs of looked after children, particularly how to help them achieve emotional wellbeing and to reach their full potential. There is a serious lack of evidence about the complex learning and behavioural needs of many looked after young people and the ways they do or do not benefit from recent policy and other initiatives. The children in the C4EO (2009) report say that, "receiving emotional support enhances their self-esteem, sense of belonging and emotional well being".

3. Methodology

As the study requires interaction between the researcher and the people / setting being researched it is considered that the most appropriate method for data collection to be qualitative research as this method helps the researcher draw meaning out of a situation. This approach offers the researcher an opportunity to gain a holistic perspective of the situation. A qualitative approach was also used because it can offer insight into people's perspectives, attitudes and beliefs and answer important questions that cannot be answered from quantitative research (Green and Thorogood 2004). One of the major criticisms of qualitative research is that "it ignores the larger social structures and forces that influence existence by concentrating only on the microcosm of human experience." (Alston & Bowles 2003)

The research phenomenon is a study on the educational outcomes of looked after children in residential care in Wirral Local Authority. The research will be conducted within the local authority. The researcher will interview residential care workers to gain an insight into what factors they believe hinder and help academic achievement for young people in residential care.

Research very commonly seeks to provide explanations. Answers to 'how' or 'why' questions, how or why did something happen? (Robson 2011) Essentially, A is considered to have caused B because the occurrence of A is regularly followed by the occurrence of B. Therefore the question being asked is, 'does (A) - being in care impact on (B) - educational achievements?' Through theory and observation they develop knowledge and understanding about the mechanism through which an action causes an outcome. (Robson 2011) The researcher agrees with Bryman

(2001) "that this approach allows for theoretical content that is not amenable to direct observation."

The researcher aims to investigate the 'why' of social phenomena. What are the causes and factors associated with poor educational outcomes, Bulmer, (1986) states, 'human beings in interacting with one another have to take account of what each other is doing, they are forced to handle situations in terms of what they take into account.' The way workers interpret difficulties the young people are experiencing and their personal perceptions and experiences of external factors such as class and background will influence their values and assumptions.

A paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for those who share them. The paradigm the researcher is using is an interpretive approach as its epistemological assumptions of knowledge arises from interpretation and insight and it is grounded in empathetic communication with the subjects of the research. (D'Cruz 2004) This approach is appropriate as the researcher wants to get as much information as possible from the residential care workers. As, Sarantakos, (1998) argues, 'each method is used where and when it proves the most suited and the best way to obtain the information required.' Hermeneutics is relevant to this research as this is just one example of the process whereby people make sense of their world. The research task is to interpret text, (perceptions), of key workers, therefore, several hermeneutic strategies must be considered. For instance, the closer one is to the source of the text the more valid one's interpretation is likely to be. This is a sharp contrast to the positivist stance of 'distance' from the object being studied. Carer's of looked after children can interpret their language much more readily than outsiders. (Robson 2002)

Interpretive approaches tend to criticise traditional quantitative positivistic research as there is a rejection of the view that the 'truths' about the social world can be established by using natural science methods. Interpretive approaches believe that people, unlike the objects of the natural world, are conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them. (Robson 2002) Blaikie (1993), states, 'that facts and figures cannot be separated' and Sarantakos, (1998), argues, 'that social phenomena exists not 'out there' but in the minds of interpretations and reality cannot be defined objectively but only subjectively. Reality is interpreted in 'social action'. The researcher is using a qualitative methodology approach as this enables a further knowledge of the situation when seeking to describe social reality. This is appropriate as the research centralises the concerns of a marginalised and disempowered group. (Alston & Bowles 2003) Qualitative methods are far more flexible and allow the researcher to change and develop the methods employed. (Smith 2009)

The Sample:

The researcher recruited 6 residential care workers who are all employed by a private children's residential care service provider. The researcher interviewed staff who worked in four of the children's homes in various locations across Wirral.

The sample size for this project was determined by the limited time available and the difficulty in analysing large amounts of data collected from interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and provided in-depth data. The researcher's justification for using interviews is that they enable the researcher to gain subjective meanings rather than obtaining responses within a standard format. (Banister 2011) The researcher is aware that the sample size used also depends upon the paradigm

used and the chosen approach to the analysis. As the researcher wants to gain as much information about the experiences from the residential care workers as possible then an in depth analysis was required so therefore a smaller sample size of participants is needed. The manager of the children's homes distributed the participant information sheets to a number of staff at a team meeting and asked them to let her know or contact the researcher directly themselves if they wanted to ask any questions. The participants were given time to think about whether they wanted to take part in the study. The manager of the children's homes then provided the researcher with the names and the contact details of the participants. The researcher telephoned each person individually to discuss the project in more detail, arrangements were made and a convenient date, time and location were agreed. Individual interviews took place in private in the children's home where the care staff where on shift that day. The young people were at their education providers when the researcher arrived to undertake the interviews.

The manager gave the information sheets to a selected number of staff at the team meeting; these were house leaders, more senior members of the team. This is known as purposive sampling, this allows us to select the sample for the study for a purpose. It also gives insights to a particular issue related to the study area. It was useful to have experienced persons so that the researcher could gather as much information as possible. This procedure allows the researcher to choose participants who are likely to 'yield useful information.' (Whittaker 2009) It is often based upon participants' knowledge and experience, hence making the interview more successful as the participant will be more likely to discuss the issues. A disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the researcher may 'inadvertently omit

vital characteristics or may be subconsciously biased in selecting the sample.' (Gray 2004)

Pilot:

The researcher undertook a pilot of one interview (Appendix 1) to test out the questions and analysis. Robson (2002), states that, "before the main data collection, you can and should gain experience through pilot work." Robson (2002) also claims that, "these designs are interactive, enabling the sensitive enquirer to capitalise on unexpected eventualities."

Interviews were semi-structured with open ended questions, as these provide no restrictions on the content or manner of the reply other than on the subject area. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews are that they are flexible, allow more depth and encourage co-operation and rapport. (Robson 2002) This allowed the researcher to move into new areas of inquiry and to better understand the perspectives and priorities of the subject. (Robson 2002) However, the major factor against interviewing is the lack of anonymity and this could restrict the answers people are willing to give. (Smith 2009) The researcher will reassure participants that results will be confidential and not discussed. Interviews can take a long time to do and it can be a lengthy process to analyse the information. The researcher ruled out observations as they can be time consuming and the researcher being present can influence results. (Mayo 1945)

Time Scales:

Tasks	Start Date	Completion Date
Fill out ethics application to university research ethics committee	May 2011	May 2011
Submit ethics application to university research ethics committee	July 2011	July 2011
Start Literature search	August 2011	October 2011
Contact Children's Homes to arrange recruiting participants	February 2012	March 2012
Advertise for participants	March 2012	April 2012
Collect data / interviews	May 2012	June 2012
Transcribe data	June 2012	July 2012
Analyse data	July 2012	August 2012
Write up literature review/ report	July 2012	August 2012
Proof read final report /dissertation	September 2012	October 2012
Submit dissertation	October 2012	

Trustworthiness

The strength of the qualitative research lies in the trustworthiness, the 'truth value' of the findings. The researcher has considered how one can establish confidence in the truth of the findings of a particular enquiry for the respondents with which and the context of within which the enquiry was carried out. It is suggested that the criteria for claiming or judging trustworthiness will depend upon the paradigm informing such judgements. The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are worth paying attention to. (Guba and Lincoln 1985)

In any qualitative research project four issues of trustworthiness demand attention these are presented below.

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Conformability:

Credibility:

With regard to how credible this study is it is worth nothing that procedures such as explication of personal bias and audit traits have been followed in this study which is commonly used to increase the dependability and trustworthiness of qualitative research. (Anastas 2004) It is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a 'credible' conceptual interpretation of the data from the participant's original data. (Guba & Lincoln1985) The researcher has collated and analysed these data and will consider how credible the findings are. As Whittaker (2009) argues, "you need to consider whether the conclusions are supported by sufficient evidence and whether they have a constant logic. It is important to be rigorous about this because we tend to view findings that we agree with as more credible.

Transferability:

Is the degree to which the findings of this enquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project? The researcher noted the specifics of the research situation and compared them to a specific environment / situation. The results of the study were transferable to another context, for example, the wider context. The researcher was able to identify this process in using the coding scheme as a tool. This is demonstrated in the research at both at a local and national level and how results are transferred beyond individual research studies. It is hoped that the transferability of the findings are meaningful to all of those involved in supporting looked after children and helping them to achieve positive future outcomes.

Dependability:

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress close ties between credibility and dependability arguing that in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. This may be achieved through use of 'overlapping methods' such as focus groups and individual interviews. In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the process within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. To ensure the dependability the researcher has provided in-depth coverage allowing the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed. The researcher has demonstrated a clear understanding of the methods and their effectiveness including a detailed account of the research design and its implementation. (Shenton 2004)

Confirmability:

Patton cited in Miles & Humerman (1994) associates objectivity in science with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skill and perception. He recognises, however, the difficulty of ensuring real objectivity, since, as even tests and questionnaires are designed by humans, the intrusion of the researcher's biases is inevitable. Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. The role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasised, in this context to reduce the effect of investigator bias. Miles and Huberman (1994) consider that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions. However, due to time constraints; strategies such as triangulation were not used. (Holloway & Wheler 1996)

The 'applicability' of the qualitative research methods is greatly improved by getting an independent analysis of the data by more than one researcher. Therefore, a second opinion of the data interpretation will be obtained from another person who is not directly involved in the research project. To ensure a true picture is given, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial. (Seale 1999) When judging (testing) qualitative work, redefinition is required in order to fit the realities of qualitative research. (Strauss & Corbin 1990) In contrast, Stenbacka (2001) argues that since reliability issue concerns measurement then it has no relevance in qualitative research.

It is important that the researcher has a critical perspective during the research and upholds the professional values which promote anti-oppressive practice and a non-

judgemental approach considering contextual factors, such as unequal power relations'. (Smith 2009) Some researchers believe that it is important to 'bracket off' their own beliefs and assumptions in order to avoid distorting either the process or their findings. (Gearing 2004) In contrast the research cannot be totally 'value free' as what helps the reader is the opportunity to locate the situated knowledge claims it makes in relation to the perspective and acknowledged preconceptions of the researcher. (Smith 2009) The researcher understands that human nature makes pure objectivity impossible. (Carey 2009) The researcher will attend supervision sessions with the University during the research project to allow reflectivity and aim to prevent research bias. Critics have accused qualitative researchers of continually moving their own goal posts. Therefore, the researcher will allow periods away from their field work for reflection, planning and consultation with colleagues. (Greenhalgh 1997)

Data Collection

The interviews were carried out at a various children's homes across Wirral. This study was undertaken whilst the young people were at school. This study involved conducting six semi structured interviews which took approximately 45 minutes each. An interview schedule was used and the topics were based on the themes that had emerged from the literature review.

The researcher asked open ended questions relating to the key themes that were identified during the literature review. In, addition, the researcher gave participants the opportunity to share any other thoughts or experiences that hadn't been mentioned in the questions. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone with permission. The interviews were then transcribed by playing back the recordings on the Dictaphone and then typing this data on to the computer in order to be analysed.

Data analysis

The transcripts provided a detailed account of the interviews. The data then needed analysing in order to be understood. Thematic analysis was used for this study as it was the most realistic, manageable and appropriate way of analysing the data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis was the most fitting method for this study as it identified analysed and reported patterns and themes within the data according to the method described by Braun & Clarke (2006). The study used the 4 stages to analyse the data:

- Familiarisation with the data. This involved transcribing the interviews, re-reading the data and noting down ideas.

- Generating initial codes. The codes identify a feature of the data that refer to the basic information that can be assessed.

- Collating the identified codes into potential themes.

- Reviewing themes and the relationship of categories and sub categories within each theme.

Ethical considerations

The researcher plans to apply to the University of Chester Ethics committee and the Wirral Borough Council Ethics Board for permission to proceed with the research proposal. Research participants must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research. The project will be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality. The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. (Economic and Social Research Council 1965) Informed consent is an

ethic that is central to all the codes of ethics. Signed consent from the residential care staff participating in the study will be obtained before the study begins. The researcher ensured that participants were fully aware of the purpose of the research and that they understood their rights and they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. A participant information sheet was given out before hand explaining what the study involved and agreements were made with everyone involved regarding how the data will be used. The researcher was guided by the Data Protection Act (1998) and assurances were given that the data taken from interviews will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

It is of paramount importance that the researcher gains the trust of the participants and respects their rights. The participants will be informed that they have 'access rights to see his/her personal data at any time' (Section 7 Data Protection Act 1998). The researcher has a professional responsibility to provide further information in regards to accessing support services and to inform the research participations of all outcomes. (Carey 2009)

All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Data and audio recordings will be stored and locked away in a safe place. Personal information will be treated as confidential and anonymous. It will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be transferred to any other organisations. However, under the Children Act (1989/2004) the researcher has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and any disclosures that a young person is at risk of or is experiencing 'significant harm' then this information must be passed on. These procedures will be thoroughly explained before the research begins. (Brammer 2007)

There were three main areas for ethical consideration throughout this research study:

Autonomy and self – determination

The purpose of the research was explained. Written, informed consent with the assurance that confidentiality and anonymity of the participants would be retained was obtained from participants.

Non- maleficence (not causing any harm)

The research study was approved by the University of Chester Research Ethics Committee. Although the research does not pose any physical threat to participants the researcher is fully aware that she needs to be sensitive to cultural values and be aware of the social and cultural context in which the research is conducted. (Leathard & McLaren 2007)

Role of the researcher:

Anti oppressive practice

The researcher aimed to conduct the study in an anti oppressive manner and considered the stigma and oppression that can impact on young people who live in residential care. It is particularly important when we conduct research with marginalised social groups that we recognise that we may need to compromise some of the specific requirements of scientific methods. Not only do we have to ensure that our actual research process does not cause harm to the groups we are researching, but also that the research is not used to further marginalise these already vulnerable people. (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005)

To ensure the study was not oppressive in any way the research proposal and interview questions were considered and approved by the University of Chester research ethics committee (Appendix 3) This study has given care workers an opportunity to have their say and be heard about what they believe are the key factors that hinder and help young people in their care with their educational goals.

Power and the researcher

Qualitative research relies on the researcher building good interpersonal relations with participants. It is important that the researcher recognised possible power imbalances and that the participants are not saying what the researcher wants to hear. The researcher explained to the participants that this was an opportunity to empower them as they are the experts in knowing their own experiences. The aims are thus to produce understanding that is useful for the group you are working with, and to empower those people, rather than to do research 'on' them. (Green and Thorogood 2004)

Participants

The names of the participants that took part in this study have been changed. Pseudonyms have been used for each participant. This is to ensure that participants maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Participant 1 will be referred to as Abby and participant 2 will be referred to as Becky. Participant 3 will be referred to as Claire, participant 4 as Dave, participant 5 as Danny and participant 6 as Fliss. The participants were all employed by the same agency and worked in various children's homes across Wirral. The researcher did not opt to select a particular gender or ethnicity for the purpose of the study.

4. Findings and discussion

The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons why some children who are looked after fail to achieve their educational goals. This chapter will present the findings for each theme that emerged from the data through the interviews which will be supported by relevant published literature in the form of a discussion. Within each of these themes there were categories and sub categories. The following themes which emerged from the data were used in the coding scheme. The researcher has focused on three of the main categories that emerged from the literature review and the data from the interviews; these can be identified in the table below.

Factors that Hinder –

1. Pre Care Factors
- Experiences / reasons for coming into care. (Neglect, abuse, trauma and loss)
- Poverty / disadvantaged
- Family background & culture
- Lack of self belief / fear of failure and rejection

2. In care factors:
- Instability of placements
- Poor contact / no contact
- Inconsistency & limitations on staff
- Leave care too young
- Lack of support / resources
- Self reliant / unwilling to accept help

3. External:

Educational & Wider environment

- Poor school attendance, truancy & exclusions
- Stigma and Labelling

Due to the huge amount of information received from the participants during the interviews the researcher is not able to use all of these data because of the word limitation on this piece of research.

Interview Data analysis: Hinders

Theme 1

Pre care factors:

The following pre care themes have been divided into sub headings/themes:

- Difficulties and experiences that brought them into care: *(Neglect, abuse, trauma, loss & poor parenting)*

The difficulties and experiences that brought them into care, early loss or trauma, poor parenting, family problems and disadvantage can have a lasting impact particularly where needs are not subsequently met. (Dixon 2007) The overwhelming weight of evidence shows that emotional abuse can have severe and long lasting effects. (Reconstruct 2012) "For many, care can have a positive impact; however, in some cases the care system can fall short of adequately compensating for earlier difficulties and disadvantage. (SEU 2003) Over three-quarters of looked after children in England are in care because they have suffered abuse or neglect, family dysfunction or absent parents (DfE 2010) Any consideration of educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers must therefore be made within the context of their vulnerability and wider need. (Berridge *et al* 2008) Winter & Cohen (2005) illustrate the difficulties that can be faced by young people through ignorance of their personal history and the sense of loss that this brings.

> Fliss: *"Because of the difficulties that they experience before coming into care you know a lot of these kids end up in care because of some sort of neglect, abuse or trauma, they have experienced a lot of loss and have poor attachments as a result of this."*

- Poverty and disadvantage

The socio-economic risk factors that are linked with family breakdown and admission to care also predict low educational achievement, such as social class and poverty. (Berridge 2008) "We know that many children entering care do so with a legacy of disadvantage that can predispose them to poor career outcomes. Government figures show that children and young people in care are largely drawn from disadvantaged families." (Stein 2004) This is also supported by the DfES (2000) who recognised that "parental background has been identified as a factor in economic activity and living in council rented accommodation, having neither parent in full time work or parents in manual occupations increases the likelihood of non-participation in education, employment or training." Axford (2008) claims that, "a child is not socially excluded simply by virtue of living in a low income household; however, a child who has limited contact or poor relations with family, or who is perhaps unable to access certain social or leisure services for reasons of distance or discrimination, is vulnerable to exclusion.

> Fliss: *"The child may have been in a situation where the family are quite poverty stricken which can be another thing as well that can link on to other children noticing which can lead to bullying, low self esteem and low self worth.*"

> Becky: *"Sometimes I think that it is much harder for looked after children to find opportunities."*

- Family background & culture

There is evidence in the research by Harker (2004) that a high number of looked after children in the study *"Who Takes Care of Education 18 months on?"* birth parents had left school at the first opportunity and had minimal educational

qualifications or none. For many parents, their own personal school experiences create obstacles to involvement. Parents who have dropped out of school do not feel confident in school settings. (Finders & Lewis 1994) All 6 of the participants who were interviewed highlighted their concerns about the family's educational background and if stated that many parents did not view education as important. This then impacts on the young person and how they perceive education and learning.

Abby: *"If she gets back in to those sort of traditions we wonder whether that will override you know her desires and goals that she has while she is here with us? And of course those family traditions don't involve education or being in work"*

Becky: "*If family members don't value education then the young person thinks, 'what's the point in doing this every day? I can get by without a job."*

To conclude the other participants confirm this is one of the major factors that hinder the educational achievement of young people:

Dave: "*What they (the parents) have experienced of school affects the young person and if they (the parents) did not value education then it is highly likely that the young person won't value education and nine times out of ten they don't value it."*

Danny: *"It depends as if they come from an environment where their parents aren't too concerned about their education then they tend not to be bothered."*

- Lack of self belief & fear of rejection

The Framework of Assessment (Department of Health 2000) defines identity as the child's growing sense of self as a separate and valued person. It includes the child's view of self and abilities, self image and self-esteem, and having a positive sense of individuality. Those children who have not received care giving that has been nurturing and accepting, including those whose parents abused or rejected them, may have very negative working models of themselves (Fonagy &Target 1997) and

may not have enabling role models through which to support the development of positive identities. (Lasson 2002) In school children from abused backgrounds often seem to be pre-occupied, but this is often combined with an expectation that adults will be unresponsive and rejecting. A sense of failure in their school work and a struggle to make friends can all add to their vulnerability and perpetuate a negative view of themselves. (Reconstruct 2012) McMurray et al (2011) '*Shards of the looking glass*: *restoring the significance of identity in promoting positive outcomes for looked-after children.*' Within this paper's title refers to Cooley's (1902) metaphor for how identity is built up through interactions with others and the significance of being mindful of the relationships that young people have in their lives. Listening to children in need or looked after takes time. (McLeod 2007).

Becky: *"They tend not to believe in what they can do and they think they won't succeed in life as they are not capable or able to do well. I think they fear rejection and not being accepted for who they really are. I feel that they are scared of failure."*

Theme 2:

In care factors:

- Placement instability

A further predictor of poor outcomes was instability whilst in care. Many research studies have stressed the disruption and harm caused to young people by multiple care placements and changes in educational provision. (Audit Commission 1994) Placement movement is a common feature of the care experience for all too many young people. (Jackson 2002) Proposals to reduce placement movement and educational disruption are prominent in current policies. However, although it is recognised that increasing care stability is crucial and these messages are echoed within the White Paper (DfES 2007), they carry wider implications for the availability

of care places. (Dixon 2007) Ofsted (2000) *Raising Achievement of Children in Public Care* investigated 26 local authority children's homes. The findings were that the majority of the homes visited catered for secondary age school pupils, many of whom have experienced a series of failed foster placements. Children in local authority care may have changes to their educational care placement which can result in lack of continuity and loss of education. (McGowan 2009) Driscoll (20011) states that, "placement stability remains a concern, with 12.9 per cent of looked after children experiencing three or more placements in 2010 (DfE 2010) often entailing disruption to their education. Many describe feeling uninvolved and powerless regarding important decisions affecting their future. (Leeson, 2007)

> Becky: *"I think that the stability they have had has an impact, it depends how often they have moved and how many placements they have had, has it been all in the same area or have they moved from school to school."*

> Dave: "*The more schools they have gone to and the more obstacles they have had in placement then make it more difficult to get them connected into a school."*

- Poor contact / no contact

In one study by the Department of Health (1998), the main reason why over half (53%) of the children were admitted to children's homes was breakdown of relationship between young person and family' (Sinclair and Gibbs 1998) Most children in residential care have contact with their families. However, moving into residential care can further weaken connections with family. The same study found that a fifth of children had no contact or had 'no family', which is particularly concerning given the importance that looked after children often attach to family. (Axford 2008) Therefore there is no sense of belonging; reciprocal interaction is a substantive feature of attachment theory where a child's internal mental

representation of self and self-worth develops through interactions with an attachment figure. (Fonagy & Target 1997)

Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) also noted that four in ten residents had lost contact with one or more 'important friend'. The significance of protecting and maintaining children's former familial relationships and respecting their cultural heritage is important to children's development. (McMurray *et al* 2011) Winter & Cohen (2005) advocate that practitioners support children to understand their family roots to help them gain a sense of who they are and where they have come from to buffer against emotional problems. Unfortunately contact for some children can have a damaging and negative impact on their wellbeing, as Claire explains.

Claire: *"If contact is not very good, then this can affect them for up to a week after, they can't sleep, or they get upset then obviously they are not going to prioritise school."*

- Inconsistency of staff & limitations on staff

The residential workers interviewed for this study commented that changing staff rotas was destabilising for the young people. It was difficult to provide continuity for overseeing homework and preparing for school, and also for individual workers to make contact with the schools some workers did not know what was key stages were. This is also recognised in Ofsted Report (2000) "workers therefore had little knowledge of what was required in specific subjects and found it hard to offer what was required in specific subjects especially at Key Stage 4." "There are limitations on residential care workers and what they are able to do to get the young people to go to school, they are restricted as they can't treat them like they would their own children." (C4OE 2009)

Claire: *"I think because the young people can be quite challenging you have to have different staff but it's about keeping the same people though if you could. This is so they are familiar and get used to who is going to be with them most of the time."*

Becky: *"We are limited on what we can do with the kids, as this is different to what a parent could do with their own child, you know we can't physically drag a child out of bed and shove them in a car and take them to school."*

- Leave care too young

A significant number of looked after children who leave care, especially those who are more vulnerable face an enduring struggle. (Dixon 2007) A study commissioned by the DfES took place across seven English local authorities during 2001 – 2003, conducting baseline interviews with 106 young people approximately two months after leaving care. Follow up interviews were also conducted ten – twelve months later to find out how they were progressing. The most significant factor in relation to participation was the age at which they left care. Almost three-quarters (73%) of those leaving aged 18 or over were active in Employment Education or Training (EET) compared to a third of those who left aged 16 (31%) or 17 (33%). This provides a clear message that those who leave care earlier have a higher risk of non-participation, a finding mirrored by Jackson et al. (2005). Only 1% of care leavers attend University in comparison to 38% of the wider population. (Jackson et al., 2003) Understanding and locating the factors associated with non-participation can inform the development of support to help young people maximise their potential, overcome obstacles and achieve economic and overall well being. (Dixon 2007) Achieving independence should be a gradual, continuing process, and young people who successfully make the transition to adulthood tend to do so at an older age, and when they have had good emotional support and good quality care during the time they have been looked after. (C4EO 2009)

Dave: *I think extending the support post 18 maybe a unit that can offer support till they are 21. Young people still need their parents. It is a massive shock to the system you know there is no way I could live on my own when I was 18. I think extending the support post 18, money is the key factor.*

A critique of the C4EO (2009) data is that they not capture the more complex processes involved in working with looked after children and the many different ways in which policy and practice is impacting on their educational experience and outcomes. The strengths of the C4EO review include: identification of the best available evidence from research and national data and it has a full comprehensive and documented search for relevant information. An analysis of the quality and strength of evidence was also undertaken and results were clearly displayed. The limitations of the review is that it did not extend the search criteria and does not incorporate literature relating to the care of looked after young people generally, which may be extremely important in understanding the educational experience of the looked-after group.

Research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2003) *'Into the Mainstream'* evidenced that young people leaving care are less likely to be involved in EET and more vulnerable to poor life chances and social exclusion later in life. Many care leavers face disadvantage as a legacy of their earlier experiences and post-care circumstances. Many continue to face considerable challenges in finding and sustaining education, employment and training in the early years after care. (Dixon 2007) It is evident in the literature that young people leave care too early and struggle to deal with the transition. Dixon (2007) states, that for many it can prove overwhelming and destabilising, particularly in the absence of consistent and effective support networks. Harker (2004) highlights that support in stable and long term placements are conducive to educational progress.

During the interview with Abby she talked about a young person who was not attending her educational setting. Abby thought that it was because something had happened at college but after talking to the young person it became clear that this was not the case. It was because she was worried about leaving care.

Abby: *"Nothing had happened in college it was things outside to do with the transition into adulthood and leaving care."*

Dave: *"When they are in care they all this support but once they get to 16-17 year olds you have to start reducing this and I understand why? It doesn't make sense to me it's hard as you have to kind of wrap them in cotton wool to a point and then say actually no this is what is going to happen now and its all in such a short period of time."*

- Lack of support & resources

There are fundamental problems within the care system that make it far more difficult for a looked after child to achieve educational success than a child growing up in his or her own family. (Jackson 2010) Residential establishments may provide a poor environment for encouraging children and young people in their education. Berridge & Brodie (1998) found that adolescent units continued to provide a poor educational environment, with a lack of books and newspapers. Berridge (1996) cited in Berridge & Brodie (1998) found that facilities for homework were sometimes unsatisfactory with limited privacy for study and staff did not make full use of opportunities to prompt wider discussion.

Becky: *"In the home we don't have a lot of necessary educational resources that are available."*

It was also noted during the interviews that many of the young people in the children's homes had unsupportive parents and sometimes unsupportive carers; this

lack of interest had a negative impact on their education and motivation to do well.

Young people experiencing residential care do less well, but this is compounded by

their greater behavioural problems and more unsupportive parents. (Beveridge 2007)

Dave: *"On paper it looks good because they have support from different people, they have a lot of people working in their favour, but in reality it is down to the young person at the end of the day, and if they don't want all that then there is very little we can do."*

- Young person self reliant & unwilling to accept help

Some looked after children can have a strong sense of self-reliance. (Cameron,

(2007), Samuels and Pryce, (2008) Having been let down, as they saw it, both by

their birth families and professionals, self-reliance was regarded as a positive

attribute. Cameron (2007) has suggested that refusal of professional support may be

indicative of excessive self-reliance and that professionals should beware of

regarding it as 'difficult' behaviour. Driscoll (2011) reports on a small pilot study

which explored young people's own accounts and explanations in relation to their

educational experiences. Self-reliance could become a limiting quality; the young

people in this study explained their rejection of professional help in terms of the need

for such relationships to be built on mutual respect and trust, and identified the need

for personal advice from a consistent and trusted source.

Fliss*: "He can't handle positive praise; this has a negative impact on his behaviour.*

Becky: *"Some have unrealistic expectations and think they can get by without help and they can achieve it on their own without help or putting the work in."*

Theme 3

External Factors: Education & Wider Environment (stigma)

- Poor school attendance, truancy and exclusions

Children in local authority care can often experience disruption to family life and schooling. Changes to care placement can result in lack of continuity and loss of education. (McGowan 2009) The issue of education of young people in residential care was highlighted by Roger Kent in the Children's Safeguards Review when he stated that it is "still not being taken seriously enough" and while "some units work hard with the children and schools to ensure they attend regularly, far too many refuse to go to school, or are excluded". (Kent 1997) High rates of truancy and exclusion are evident within the looked after population. Almost two thirds (62%) of young people had been excluded an (71%) reported truancy (37%) of which was persistent. Jackson (1987), "School all too often can become a place of disappointments, for all too many it is a place of oppression, fear, failure and rejection." However, on a practical level missing out on school can result in missing out work experience placement's and on opportunities to develop confidence, interpersonal skills and a sense of achievement through academic and non-academic activities. (Dixon 2007)

Becky: *"If they have been excluded then it is very difficult to find another school as they look at past history and attendance of the young person and schools do not want problematic young people."*

Looked after children are far more likely than others, to be without, a school place for extended periods following a change of placement and are at high risk of exclusion. (Blyth & Milner 1998) For disadvantaged children one of the most worrying is for children who are out of education for long periods, they are at a higher risk of being exploited. (Hugh 2009) Berridge and Brodie (1998) reported that in some residential units none of the children attended school and that this situation was often passively accepted by staff. Many young people truant from school for a number of reasons; Southwell (2006) argues that truancy can be seen as a key indicator of unidentified

and unmet special educational needs that have been ongoing. All looked after children are required to have a PEP as an integral part of the care plan. PEP's are designed to identify individual needs and implement provision of additional support. (McGowan 2009) However, despite government initiatives, such as PEP's there remain concerns about the participation of looked after children in their education plans. (Hugh 2009)

- Stigma & labelling

A study of the *Educational Success for Children in Public Care: advice from a group of high achievers* examined the opinions of 38 high achieving young people on what they think are the best ways to enhance the educational experience of looked after children. Many of these individuals emphasised their dislike of being 'singled out' by the teacher. A third of participants believed that negative stereotypes and low expectations among professionals and care providers were major obstacles to their educational success. (Jackson 2002) The *Care Matters* project recommends, raising the profile of looked after children, challenging low expectations and aspirations and to place a strong emphasis on increasing participation. (DfES 2006)

Fliss*: "Children don't want to go to school as they feel they stand out, they feel they stand out a mile."*

Danny: *"A lot of young people feel embarrassed of saying that they are in care because this may mean that there is some sort of failing on the families' part in which case it reflects on them."*

The main factors identified that help looked after children to achieve their educational goals are listed in the table below:

Factors that Help:

Theme 1

- Practical & emotional Support

Theme 2

- Supportive educational placements

Theme 3

- Stability of placements

Theme 4

- Multi-agency working

Theme 5

- Motivation / resilience

Theme 6

- Engage with positive activities

Due to the word limitation is it not possible for the researcher to investigate all of the themes that were identified during the interviews so will focus on the following 6 key themes.

4.1.1 Interview Data Analysis: What helps?

Theme 1

- Emotional & Practical Support

Emotional support is essential in helping young people in care, it important for staff to take an active interest in their lives, commending their achievements and helping them with any problems which arose. (Gallagher et al. 2004) The most important single factor is having at least one person who can give unconditional positive regard, who thinks well of the child and makes them feel important and cared for. (Berridge 2007) The experience of a good supportive relationship also provides a role model and it can help a child to think about choices and to make decisions. There are signs that carers are now more proactive in supporting children's education. (Driscoll *et al* 2011)

> Becky: *"It is important for the carers to kind of have that faith in them for them as often they don't have it in themselves.*
>
> Dave: *"What they need is emotional warmth and love and money can't buy that, you know money can't buy these things, you know how can you substitute a warm loving environment?*
>
> Abby: *"We can try to pull the best out of our young people that we work with. Also show them what they actually can do and what they are actually good at and try to come up with suggestions and how they can use that in the future."*

Practical support is paramount in helping children in residential care reach their full potential. A study in Good Practice in the Education of Children in Residential Care (2004) concluded that in the home itself, the staff would motivate and if need be, help the children with their homework and would read with them. The children were given a desk in their bedrooms, which guaranteed they had somewhere quite and

comfortable to complete their homework. (Gallagher *et al.* 2004) The majority of participants interviewed agreed that there were adequate resources within the homes and that the young people have staff available to help them with their homework. The young people also had access to a variety of resources and equipment to help them with their learning.

Dave: "*We help them with their homework; they have lap tops, the internet, library cards, books, their own room for privacy and a desk to work on. They also have revision clubs in school.*"

Claire: "*We used to give them practical support, make sure things were organised the night before and have their things ready for the next day, also we would take them to school and pick them up just to encourage them really.*"

Offering advice and guidance to the young people in a sensitive manner were other important factor highlighted during the interviews.

Becky: "*We advise them and say look this is what the college will expect of you and they are going to want to see that you are attending school we try to explain is the next step.*"

Theme 2

- Supportive educational placements

Ofsted (2008) Report "*Looked After Children: Good Practice in Schools",* shows that schools can make a significant progress to improve educational outcomes for children in care by keeping looked after children engaged in and taking responsibility for their learning. It involved close monitoring of academic, social and personal progress and recognising that looked after children may be gifted and talented. The Skinner Report's (1992) fundamental principle in helping young people reach their full potential was that, "young people should be actively encouraged in all aspects of their education, vocational training or employment and offered career guidance.

Becky: "*We always promote education positively in the homes, staff will never speak negatively of school because we try to encourage the young person to achieve the highest level of education that they can.*"

Also that individual's educational needs should be identified and met." There was clear evidence in the Skinner Report (1992) that some schools were not always as understanding of the needs of looked after children and that many of the children were being set up to fail as they were not able to keep up with the national curriculum. Stein (2004) argues that there should be more choice for young people to keep them engaged and motivated. School can offer a real respite and distraction and when encouraged to do well in certain areas their self esteem and sense of achievement and efficacy grow. (Reconstruct 2012)

Claire: "*Schools need to be more flexible in meeting the young person's needs, not everyone is academic*".

Becky: "*Schools help the pupils and spot any potential problems whether that is problems at home or a learning disability.*"

Theme 3

- Stability of care placements

Research conducted by Reconstruct Research (2012) Claims that, stability in care promotes successful outcomes. External factors such as a good school experience and supportive relationships can make a difference and decrease the risk of poor outcomes. (Reconstruct Research 2012) Kent (1997) cited in Kendrick (1998) states that, residential staff should put efforts into ensuring that children obtain the best education they can. They need to be involved in children's schooling, homework and providing a supportive educational environment. Harker (2004), states that, one of the main factors that leads to stability and positive improvements is the degree of

support for education provided within care placements. The promotion of education and school attendance within care placements assisted looked after children's progress.

Becky: *"They are more likely to do well at school if they have had more stable placements and moved around less. If they don't attend school we sort of disengage or it encourages them to want to stay at home again"*.

Theme 4

- Multi-agency working

Lord Laming's Report (2003) brought about the publication of a number of documents which has led to the configuration of children's services. The emphasis on working together and creating a seamless service to meet the needs of children and young people required a focus on multi-agency working. The Every Child Matters (2003), five outcomes provided a framework for organisations and professionals to work with to ensure that all children had the opportunity to reach their full potential and thrive in a safe environment. Fletcher -Campbell (1997), states that, multi- disciplinary groups aim to intervene at an earlier stage to support young people experiencing difficulties at school. The Children Act (2004) emphasises the importance of multi-disciplinary working amongst all agency's who work with children and young people. "Individual children, especially some of the most vulnerable children and those at greatest risk of social exclusion, will need co-ordinated help from health, education, social services, and quite possibly the voluntary sector and other agencies, including youth offending services". (Brammer 2010)

Becky: *"It is important that all the different parties are all working together to try to achieve the best outcome for that young person because when it works well they can go as far as they possible can without things limiting them."*

Abby: "*It is important going to meetings at the college with tutors and unravelling if there is any sort of issues that is preventing her from reaching her full potential. The tutor attends multi-agency meetings held at the house.*"

Theme 5

- Motivation and resilience

A key factor that was recognised as having a positive impact on the education of young people in the homes was resilience and motivation*."* If staff encourage young people to be motivated then this helps to boost the children's emotional competencies, in key areas such as self-esteem, confidence and assertiveness – knowing that these are often deficient in looked after children (Rosen 1999), but also vital to the children's educational success. (Lawrence 1996) Resilience enables children to acquire good problem solving skills and promotes good self esteem, these enable a child to learn coping strategies and then they are more able to deal with stressful situations. Resilience acts as a buffer against difficulties, factors leading to healthy development despite adversity and vulnerability. Resilience refers to qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity and may help a child to cope, survive and even thrive in the face of great hurt or disadvantage. (Gilligan 2000)

Abby: *"It's about motivation and where they see themselves after they come out of the care system."*

Becky*: If the young person does not have the motivation then they are less likely to engage in educational study."*

Fliss: *"We have some that show no interest at all and say that they can't be bothered and that they do not plan on working anyway."*

Theme 6

- Engage young person with activities to promote self esteem

It is important to help improve the educational achievements of looked after children. We want to help all looked after children, no matter what their background to make the most of their talents and help them to achieve their potential. (C4EO 2009) Gilligan (2000) suggests that positive experiences in everyday living and spare time activities are important as such activities may be important in developing instrumental and social skills, enhancing social contacts, positive peer relationships and enhancing the sense of belonging to a group. Jackson & Martin (2002) recommend that looked after children should be given more freedom, support and finance to take part in hobbies and interests as this would help them socialise confidently with their peers and help them to feel less awkward and inhibited about themselves.

Abby: *"It is important for her to be involved in activities as this has helped her self esteem and confidence."*

5. Conclusion and discussion

The researcher set out find out what hinders and what helps young people in residential care reach achieve their educational outcomes. From reviewing the literature and speaking to people with knowledge on the subject the researcher has found that the same issues are highlighted from each source. The researcher is aware that there are some limitations to the study. The main one being the sample size, however a huge amount of data emerged from the interviews and the researcher was unable to use all of this in all of this in the findings due to the constraints of the word limitation. By using semi-structured interviews it enabled the researcher to ascertain how respondents felt about issues and they were able to elaborate on the answers they gave. It also gave the researcher a chance to gain a better understanding of how they felt about certain issues. The interviews also highlight what the residential care workers believe to be holding back children and what they recommend be implemented to help overcome some of these barriers.

The researcher was surprised at the huge amount of information that came out of the interviews. In each interview the participants identified the same or similar reasons and had very similar views as one another. It soon became apparent that they had a greater understanding of the needs of looked after children than the researcher previously thought. Before the interviews started the researcher thought that there would only be a limited amount of information available from the interviews and was surprised at the amount of data available. This linked in with previous research already undertaken on the subject and it highlighted that the issues of looked after children still remain the same as over twenty years ago. All of the workers who were interviewed appeared to be very supportive of the young people they were caring for

and highly motivated in ensuring that they have positive future outcomes. The goals of the project were met and it is concluded that children in residential care can have good educational outcomes and that it is possible to identify the processes by which these educational outcomes can be brought about.

Residential care workers are the primary care givers and front line workers and their roles are vital in ensuring young people reach their full potential. The concept of corporate parenting introduced the principle that a local authority has a legal and a moral duty to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would provide for their own children. (McGowan 2009) However, it must be remembered that within a local authority there are a number of other individuals and agencies, such as teaching staff, education authorities and social workers involved in the young people's education. "If the education of children in residential care is to be successful, it requires a whole host of 'actors', but also preparedness to work together. (Parker 1988)

Reflective critical summary

This chapter critically reflects my own personal assumptions and preconceptions I brought to this study and how these may affect my findings. It will also explore my own personal development on completion of my research study. Finally I will reflect on my professional development and will consider how this study may inform and assist my future as a social worker.

Personal experiences & development

During my time on placement I had to take a break from my job as a looked after children's school attendance officer so that I could complete my second 100 day social work placement. I the researcher got a weekend job working as a bank worker in the children's service being used in this study. My job role was to support children and young people in residential care and enable them to have good future life outcomes. As I have experience of working with children in care homes and I am aware of the challenges and stigma being looked after brings. I am also aware of the challenges residential care workers face in their daily task of caring for this particular group of children. These personal experiences may have helped shaped this study. It is not possible remain totally impartial as Pope and Mays (1995) state, "Qualitative research should be 'self conscious', that is, it should consider the impact of the research design and of the researcher on the process of data collection and analysis.

Professional development

Not only did my personal experiences affect this study, this study affected my professional development. Undertaking this study has taught me the importance of

research in social work. It has been a complimentary and useful learning experience for me during my first 7 months as a newly qualified social worker. Social work research informs best practice approaches, challenges policies, improves service delivery and can improve the lives of service users. The General Social Care Council Codes of Practice states that as a social worker, "you must be accountable and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills and contribute to the learning and development of others." In my future career as a social worker I intend to keep up to date with developments in social work to inform my practice. The journey I have experienced undertaking this research study has enabled me to turn a corner to channel my experiences in a positive way and using my new found knowledge to help me become a competent and efficient social worker.

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Appendix 1

Participant 1   Pilot   Interview

Researcher: Hi erm, interview with a residential care worker and is it okay if I record this information today?

Abby: Yes it's okay.

Researcher: Okay thank you, erm, I am just going to ask you some questions, which sort of focus on semi-structured interview so feel free to say anything that you know want to talk about, or if you're not sure ask me any questions.

Researcher: The first question is what can you tell me about the factors impacting upon the education of young people you look after?

Participant: I think for me personally it could be that that young person could feel different in mainstream education and that could have a negative impact on that person attending education.

Researcher: Yeah ok thanks', are there any other factors that could impact upon their education?

Abby: Erm, well the young person that I am working with at the moment, erm lost her EMA, because of obviously age, and obviously working in the house that we work in, we thought that that would impact on this young person's ability to get to college every day, and we have been surprised that this young person has continued to attend college even though she has had to fund her own travel costs, so I think really to summarise that, education is about social networks, having a structured day and to have some form of learning, so we used to think that finance was an import factor but the finance has now been removed and actually costs her money to get

education, so I think it's not just about finance and we have been pleasantly surprised by that.

Researcher: Are that's good, erm the next question is.

Researcher: How do you think being in care influences that life chances of young people?, I know you just explained a little bit then but is there anything that you think can impact on the life chances?

Abby: I think looking again, looking at an example of the young person i am currently working with, erm, who is in care obviously out of borough from where she lives, when she goes back into the area that she is living, she has already said that she may want to go and explore further courses in that area but to sort of caputilise that and to sort of summarise what you said there, if she gets back into those sort of traditions that her family and friends obviously have in that area we wonder whether that will override you know her desires and goals that she has while she is here with us and will that be able to obviously that go with her when she gets back into those family traditions and of course those family traditions don't involve education or being in work

Researcher: Okay thank you

Researcher: In your opinion what have you found to work well in supporting young people with their educational goals?

Abby: I'm thinking again you know the only person I can quote is the young person I am working with at the moment and it's been important for her to be involved in activities in college, this particular young person is, does have a mild learning difficulty but she is in a stream whereby she is the highest achiever in her group and

that position in the pecking order has helped her self esteem and confidence, I think she has stood up for people that she feels don't have a voice in college so has been like a mini advocate if you like and supported other students who don't have the same capabilities as she has........ So just refer back to your question I don't know whether I have answered your question there?

Researcher: Erm, What have you found to work well in supporting young people with their educational goals?

Abby: And I think if she was having an off day where she thought well i don't want to go to college today I have got no EMA any longer I think we'd just talk through the importance, the important person she is in other students lives and she has actually recapped on this herself, she said I am the most popular person in there because I have got time and I do take time to go and talk to people who haven't got the same ability as me.

Researcher: Yeah

Abby: And sometimes if I am in a computer class I will obviously support, and even go to the tutor and say somebody may be struggling here and might need some more time and when we have been to and I've actually been to college for discussions with her tutor they have actually described our young person as being an ambassador for the college.

Researcher: Are that's brilliant

Abby: So I hope that answers your question?

Researcher: yeah that's fantastic, cheers

Researcher: What types of things does the young person speak to you about in relation to her education?

Abby: Right erm, with regards to the course that she is on, she is my highest achiever

Researcher: ho-hum

Abby: Now we had at the beginning of term she discussed with the team here that she felt she wasn't learning anything and she was becoming bored, so we discussed possibilities with obviously the course tutor and the young person about doing possibly a level 1 business course and she considered this for a while and then decide she wanted to stay within her comfort zone, so even though she had actually, you know told the staff here that she was becoming frustrated, she was bored because she felt that she wasn't learning anything and of course there was no EMA either but she has fallen back into it and you know she gets a little bit of homework and she does some research at home on the computer with various topics and projects that were working on, so she does involve us and she does talk about how her day has gone, what she has learnt, frustrations about what has happened in class and she does keep us informed as her progress. But she was invited to go up a level but when she weighed it and she didn't want to leave that sort of, her colleagues and her peers behind and she decided to stay where she was for her final six months.

Researcher: Okay that's brilliant thanks.

Erm, another similar question really, but do you believe that the young person is positive about educational learning and her future chances in terms of employment

Abby: The young person in question has already got a job and she actually got that job herself so you know we commend her every day, and she very very proud because she says I am the only person in my family that has a job and I am holding down this job and this young person does not want to go into the benefit system if she can help it, she wants to be independent, she wants to work and she does have an idea that she will go and be a part time student as well er, this will all happen form next September so she is she does believe at this stage that she employability and we have supported her and encouraged her to look at the skills that she does have and already she has put that into practice by holding a job since August, I guessing, she is a glass collector and now she is a bar worker, so has been trained (me, yeah) and she's good with people, so we have identified the skills that she has and we have also discussed because, erm the place where she is going to live, Waitrose Distribution Centre are moving into that area, so were tracking that progress because that will be thousands of jobs in that local area, so we have talked about possibly what skills she would have and where she may fit into a company of that nature, so to answer your question yes she is looking forward to not living on benefits, still have some education but to be working full time as well, that's where she sees her future.

Researcher: Brilliant thank you.

Researcher: So what do you think residential care workers can do to help young people reach their full potential?

Abby: I think it is to encourage them to talk about issues and things that may be on their minds, obviously in college, to discuss financial restraints, such as the EMA, to support her to access services and access finance bursaries that may be available to

continue supporting her, and getting her to college and to ensure that college friends and peers are invited into the home and we have you know many evenings and party's whereby those young people, some of them have got quite severe learning difficulties, have been invited to the house and had you know events and social events at the house. We support her to erm, take part in activities outside of college there is a youth club that these young people attend as well which is connected to the college. So really I think it is about supporting her by listening to things that may be on her mind and getting her to access services and of course going to meetings at the college with tutors and unravelling if there is any sort of issues that is preventing her from reaching her full potential.

Researcher: Okay thank you.

Researcher: From your experience what would you do if the young person was refusing to attend school or college?

Abby: Again, the young person in question here is an adult, so we have got to be very mindful how we tackle a situation like that and at the beginning of term, erm, very much out of character, this young person did not attend college on a particular day and generally we thought that this was the beginning of the end of the education in other words. However, er, we discussed the issues of why she was feeling the way she was feeling and we asked if we could contact the tutor on her behalf to say that she had been feeling a little bit low about moving back to her home and was worried about transition and financial matters around that and even though she thanked us for the support, that we were happy to give, she said no I will go and explain to my college tutor of how I've been feeling, because I've got a good relationship and I know I will get support there as well and that was really the only

sort of loss on the landscape that what's been a 100 per cent education, punctuality and attendance over three years.

Researcher: Fantastic

Abby: So it's all about really trying to emphasises as much as possible but really get down to the nitty gritty of why on that particular day more than any other and she did actually go back in and she discussed with her tutor that it was nothing that has happened in college it was things outside to do with the transition into adulthood and leaving care.

Researcher: Okay, thank you.

Researcher: *So do you think it is important to have a range of services involved to support the young person?*

Abby: Can you just re-cap on that question just thinking about it still, go on.

Researcher: Do you think it is important to have a range of services involved to support the young person?

Abby: Yes I believe that it is important and I don't know what other services or support we could have given but again, you know you have got to learn by what we have done in the past and you know, reflect on that and say could we have done anything better had our young person been as such that she didn't want to attend college we might have tackled things in a different way so I think we matched our support in line to that young person's needs. Is that okay?

Researcher: Yeah okay thanks.

Researcher: Do you think that looked after children have the same opportunities as non-looked after children?

Participant: Well before we started, the issues, er the discussion that was published in The Guardian 2009 whereby only one in seven children in care, and that's only fourteen per cent er, achieved 5 good GCSE's and that's obviously ranging from A* to C so as a bench mark you know that is a statistic that really we should be mindful of and obviously I think the Government and Education Departments should be looking at that and saying how can we support young children and work with their carer's and obviously, er, their care providers as to how obviously we can improve that situation, because I have worked in other houses and the young people that I have worked with in those houses have had very, very, erm, high achievement level, if you like for a better word, and would be able to achieve 5 good GCSE's but it's about motivation and possibly were they see themselves after they come out the care system. So to answer your question I think it is possibly the support and trying to get those young people to actually achieve their potential.

Researcher: Yes. Okay thank you.

Abby: I hope I answered that okay?

Researcher: yeah that's brilliant.

Researcher: Right the next question is that do you feel there is a clear and consistent focus on education within the home itself?

Abby: In this particular home I have to say yes there is, erm it forms the very heart of every weeks timetable, erm and as I said before we do encourage the social networks to come in to the house and we don't our young person to feel any different

you know because she is in a situation. Our young person understands that we have certain rules and regulations to obey but we try and keep that you know in the back ground more so and we are very sort of, what's the word I am looking for? Very sensitive on how we obviously carry out the functions that we have to do in line with Ofsted's standards and everything, but not being very sort of don't know, in your face with her so I think that is something that you know we have all got to learn to do because we don't want our young person to feel different even though there are a number of young people within that particular college who have been in care and know the care system and our young person actually has been asked to do a talk to some new students about her life and that means her life in care and we discussed about how she felt about this and she is very very positive and is actually looking forward to standing up in front of a class and telling them about the pros and cons about her life in care.

Researcher: Are that's brilliant

Researcher: So would you say there is a good relationship between home and the college that the young person attends?

Abby: Yes in this situation I can give you some good examples of that erm, our young person's tutor at her college has been her course tutor since she started college and as a result of that you know were welcomed obviously to attend all parent/ carers evenings but from aside from that that particular tutor actually comes to professionals meetings and multi-agency meetings held at the house so erm, she comes and updates us on YPs progress and how she is doing and what courses she can look forward and you know what exams she could achieve looking forward into the future so in answer to the question yeah we can phone up and advise college if

our young person has got things on her mind or has been feeling a bit out of sorts, er we can actually sensitively and confidentially pass that information on so obviously they can keep an eye on the situation at college but she does attend all our agency meetings.

Researcher: Brilliant that's great thank you

Researcher: What can you tell me about the resources available within the home that help the young person's learning?

Abby: Well certainly our particular young person is very keen on projects so in other words transition out of care is a project, so her birthday party was a project and what we mean by that is to plan cost and be creative about some other things that she wants to achieve in life and that could be from going on holiday to planning for her next step, you know obviously going out of care into adulthood services, so from that point of view she has a lap top to complete research on she will ask advice and support from staff. Erm, we watch educational documentaries on TV together, our particular young person is particularly interested in any programmes about care situations, crime in the community, erm, violence in the home and these are the kind of things that promote, provoke, if you like debate and conversation and research er, certainly she gets a limited amount of home work which you know we can sit down and help her with but you know she is a high achiever so she doesn't struggle, so I think really it's about erm, what's happening in the world outside and certainly the James Bulger situation is something that is very very close to our YP's heart and she can't get enough information about the judicial system erm, and how people are tried and you know sort of judged and you know how the jury works so it's things like that how the world works outside of this house and that's the support that we tend to give

her with projects, finance planning and general documentaries the world at large. She takes a small interest in politics er, but she has her very own set of believes that were trying to get her now to think a little bit broadly and consider not just her small area of concern, what about all of this, so she calls our prime minister fit to burn, because she hears things in college and she jumps on the bandwagon but then we ask her to consider well about finance what happens when the money runs out who should that finance go to and how do you decide? So it's all about thought provoking stuff but certainly this is a young person that wont' watch soaps and would sooner watch a documentary any way and we will obviously engage her on those areas and I think that's where the support comes from the wider areas.

Researcher: Brilliant thanks very much.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that hinders young people from fulfilling their aspirations?

Abby: I think looking at bit broader outside of the home that I am working in at the moment I think the loss of EMA. You know certainly whereby young people have got to then find the finance to get them to college and of course if they're in education they can't claim job seekers and that seems unfair and the young person here often talks and says I could just sit on the couch all day but I don't want to do that because my future is important to me. I want to stay in education but it almost like I'm at a disadvantage because my education I have got to get myself there when really on a day that I have got no money or I want to spend my money on something else I could just stay at home because there is no EMA at the end of the month, I mean week to say you have had a hundred per cent attendance, and I know finance shouldn't always be the way forward but for this particular young person it is about

somebody actually vocalises this in an elegant way to say I am following what David Cameron is telling me to do however, he is making it difficult for me because EMA has gone, he doesn't want people on the dole but I am in college and I don't get any support so in answer to your question its balancing that financial support.

Researcher: Okay, that's brilliant thank you. I think that's all the questions so I would just like to say thank you for your time that has been really useful and I appreciate all your help. Thank you.

Abby: Thank you.

Participant   2

Researcher: This is an interview with a residential care worker about the educational outcomes of looked after children. Is it okay of I record this interview?

Becky: Yes that's fine.

Researcher: What can you tell me about the factors that impact upon the education of young people who you look after?

Becky: I think that the stability that they have had has an impact, it depends how often they have moved and how many placement they have had, has it all been in the same area or have they have gone from school to school. The more schools they have gone too and the more obstacles they have had in placement then make it more difficult to get them connected into a school. I think that part of it is erm their behaviour as well, if it is particular challenging erm then they sometimes find it more difficult to engage with their local school. We have had several kids who have had to

try several different schools and different placements to see if we can find the ones that fit. You know ones that will take young people with challenging behaviour. Some young people just don't seem to be interested in continuing their education particularly post 16 as they don't have to go. They struggle to find the motivation to go.

Researcher: So when you say placement and school breakdown have you found from personal experience that if a young person is in a stable place and had only one or two schools that are more successful?

Becky: I think from my experience they r more likely to do well at school if they have had more stable placements and moved around less. Whether that is because they are afraid of getting involved in the school and making friendships and then just being moved again, I don't know they just don't let that happen. I am sure it could be partly down to not wanting to form those bonds and being worried that if they form bonds they will be moved again so they just don't or they are just so used to being unsettled they just don't know how to settle. It does seem that the more stability they have had the more likely they are to remain in the school.

Researcher: How do you think being in care influences the life chances of young people? Do you think it is a positive or a negative experience?

Becky: Erm i think it is mixed from the studies and statistics I have seen they will be mixed life chances and turns erm like achieving economic wellbeing or less than those young people who aren't in care so they are less likely to go to or finish college courses or to go on to university or get a good job but I would imagine that their chances of doing that are higher than if they had been left in the home before they had come into care. The families and homes were probably not suitable and not

conducive to them doing well long term either. Erm but I think from what I understand of kids in the care system generally have a lower likelihood of successfully transitioning into adult hood and erm getting a good career and completing educational courses.

Researcher: Okay thanks erm well that leads on to the next question. Do you think that being in care has a negative impact on their educational achievements?

Becky: I think it can and whether that is because there is something that you don't have in your own family support through education you cant know as much as you try in the care system you can't manufacture that you can't replace that initial family structure so whether that it is down to them I am not sure so I don't know how you change that because you can't leave kids with their birth families when they are not suitable as their life chances are less than they would be when they are in care. So I am not quite sure if this fits for that.

Researcher: Okay thanks. So what in your opinion have you found to work in support young people with their educational goals?

Becky: I think you have to find the motivation and it not always easy finding the motivation so if there is something that the young person wants to achieve or if they are interested in going to college or university then it is a lot easier to get them to engage in educational study whether that normal school or college or whatever that is. But if they don't have the motivation then they are less likely to engage, but it's tricky sometimes to find the actual motivation something they actually want to achieve I think part of it is that they don't necessarily have high goals for themselves or believe in themselves either so they so I think that it's important for the carers to kind of have that faith in them for them as they don't have it in themselves so carers

some -how, can provide that and erm get across that they believe that the young person can achieve something and to keep suggesting options that they think they might like to try and can get them involved in courses that they can be involved in where ever possible sometimes its just if they r under 16 it is not always possible to get them to do exactly what they want to do because obviously there is set requirements that they have to take before GCSE's .

Researcher: Just picking up on what you said before. Why do you think that the young people have low goals for themselves?

Becky: They tend not to believe in what they can do and they think that they won't succeed in life as they are not capable or able to do well. I think they fear rejection and not being accepted for who they really are and what they have to offer wouldn't be good enough. I feel that they are scared of failure and think that is what people are expecting them to do fail.

Researcher: Yeah I understand it is very difficult and they need lots of praise and encouragement. I think if they have someone to talk to this can help them a great deal. This leads on to my next question.

Researcher: What things do young people speak to u about in relation to their education? Do they generally say how their day has gone, what things they have enjoyed doing or if there is anything they are worried about?

(Participant) Erm I know quite often we don't get a lot information about school er, if I ask how school has gone I will get 'yeah it was good' or erm 'i don't like school' depending on the kid that I am working with that day and they don't normally get along with their teachers. I won't get a lot of detail, I don't normally get anything

86

about what they actually leant that day it will be more about who they spoke to or what kid was messing about in class. But then we do have some kids that will just tell us 'what happened at school is none of our business' they might just say that so we don't get a whole lot of feed -back on what they actually do in school or what goes on in school.

Researcher: Okay thanks, so would you say that the young people are positive about education and learning and about their future chances?

Becky: Erm occasionally but most of the young people I work with, I would say that their feelings are a little bit mixed a lot of them just say that they just can't be bothered going to classes or I have had one young person who thought he knew everything and so he said that there was no point in going because he knew more than the teachers which of course we knew wasn't actually true or we have some that just show no interest at all and just say that they can't be bothered going and that they do not plan on working anyway .

Researcher: Do you mean working when they leave school?

Becky: Yes I do

 Researcher: Do you think they are quite low in their hopes and aspirations?

Becky: Yeah they have pretty low expectations of themselves, definitely

Researcher: Yeah

Becky: Occasionally some of them may have unrealistic expectations to what they want to achieve and what they think they can achieve without putting in the work and just expect to get places at university without actually attending school before they

get to university and things which is obviously isn't going to happen if they are not attending school.

Researcher: What do you when that happens is there like anything you do personally or sort of say you know that is a bit too unrealistic and may be look at smaller steps first?

Becky: We do try in terms of you know like if the young person wanted to attend a particular college course that they were interested in and they were not attending school at the time then we will advise them and say look this is what the college will expect of you and they are going to want to see that you are attending school every day and they are going to want these GCSE's so if you want to achieve this that's great but this is what you are going to have to do to get there and try to explain to them that this is the next step that they have to take to try and get on to that particular college course or to do whatever it is that they wanted to do.

Researcher: Okay erm okay thank you. What do you think residential care workers can do to help young people reach their full potential?

Becky: I think we can try to pull the best out of the young people that we work with. Also show them what they actually can do and what they are actually good at and try to come up with suggestions and how they can use that in the future. For example we had one young person who was good with his hands so we helped him to get on to a brick laying course, erm we had another one who likes food and cooking and so we looked into different apprenticeships like chefs and things like that and we managed to get him on a course, they don't always stick with it but at least they give it a go and have seen if it is something they would like or not.

Researcher: Erm okay thanks, just picking up on what you said just then about them not always sticking with it, why do you think that is?

Becky: Well I think that they lose motivation and just can't be bothered I think it sounds like a good thing to do at the time but the reality of it is that they lose focus quickly and other things take over in their lives, erm like if family members don't value work or education then the young person thinks what is the point in doing this everyday I can get by without a job.

Researcher: So you're saying family history and their perceptions play and important part in how the young people you care for view their education?

Becky: Yes they tend to look at their parents, aunts, uncles and siblings and how they live their lives. If they haven't valued education and learning then these young people tend not to value it even though we emphasise the importance of it and show how it can lead on to more positive outcomes.

Researcher: Okay thanks. So what would you do in your experience if the young person is refusing to attend school?

Becky: That partly depends on age if they are under 16's obviously we have a legal obligation to get them to school, so the ones that we have that are under 16 there are consequences put in place whenever they don't attend school.

Researcher: What consequences would that be?

Becky: Well for our young people that are kind of on courses that they need to attend erm if they don't attend school we sort of disengage until the time the school would finish so rather than let them sit down stairs and let them watch TV or play games or anything for the whole day they don't get to do that so the TV would

remain off and they would get like a sandwich for lunch instead of something really nice, and we try not to make to pleasant for them to be at home because then that just encourages them to want to stay at home again. It also depends on the care plan there is further consequences with one young person who doesn't like Monday's so his weekly take away is now on a Monday so he has to attend on a Monday or he doesn't get his weekly take away so that seems to work better with him because it is an immediate consequence if you don't go to school then you don't get it and he likes his takeaway.

Researcher: Okay so then he gets his reward, that's a good idea. So what about post 16?

Becky: Yeah, erm post 16 there is not a lot you can actually do because it is up to them if they want to attend or not so that can be a lot trickier so all we can do is try to encourage them and to explain the consequences and go through what happens if they don't attend. We will explain they might get kicked off the course what happens and be realistic about the consequences that they will have that in terms of their behaviour and choices rather than the ones that we put in place erm and kind of try to go with the benefits of like the long term benefits of sticking with their course and getting a job and having money and things like that.

Researcher: okay thanks

Researcher: So who do you think is responsible in ensuring that the young person receives a good level of education?

Becky: I thinks it is a joint responsibility erm between the school and the social worker the carers and then the parents to whatever extent their actually involved in

the young person's lives. You know we don't tend to work with young people who take education straight forward so most of the young people that I work with require some actual level of support in school so schools are responsible to ensure that they are providing that support whether that is because the young person doesn't learn in a straight forward way or they may have ADHD or dyslexia a learning disability or whatever,   so school are responsible to do what they can to make sure that they are providing the best learning environment to meet the needs of the young person. The social workers are the ones with the responsibility to ensure that they are taking into account what the school have said and also what the carers say to make decisions regarding were they have their education and things like that and further consequences, as we can only implement so many consequences. If they are not attending school then the social worker has the responsibility over us as we have the day to day responsibility of getting them up and getting them to school and doing our best , you know we are only limited on what we can do with the kids, as this is different to what a parent could do with their own child, you know we can't just physically drag a child out of bed and shove them into a car and take them to school so erm we do have limits on actually what we can do to actually get a child into school.

Researcher: Yeah, I understand it is very limited. Just picking up on what you said before, in your experience do you find that social workers do take into account information provided by carers and schools about the young person's education?

Becky: Yes I do, in my experience social workers do listen to concerns but they are not always able to do much about them, sometimes the young person may need to move from a school as their needs are not being met properly in that school and they may require another more specialist provision but this can take time and if there are

no places then the young person has to remain at that school until a place becomes available. Or erm if they have been excluded then it is very difficult to find another school as they look at the past history and attendance of the young person and schools do not want problematic young people.

Researcher: So do you think that it is important to have a range of different services involved to support the young people in your care?

Becky: Yeah

Researcher: What services are usually involved?

Becky: Well there is always the school. And the social workers and the carers and then when appropriate we have the parents in some cases parents are involved erm or previous foster carers. We have one young person whose previous foster carers are still really involved and even came in and got him out of bed one morning and took him to school because we couldn't get him out of bed and we tried for ages. He always responded well to her so she came and did that one morning and we have not had a problem with him since, I think he is scared she will come back erm yeah there has got to be other people depending on what they need weather that is teaching assistants as well or sometimes with have involvement with CAMHS or mental health nurses.

Researcher: So what you're saying is it's a mixed bag really depending on the young person's needs?

Becky: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay thanks a lot. So do you think that looked after children can have the same opportunities as non- looked after children?

Becky: Yeah I think they can have the same opportunities, I mean the opportunities are there I think sometimes you will have some children who are looked after who will achieve great things and go on to do really well for themselves erm so the opportunities are there, sometimes I think it is much harder for looked after children to find opportunities erm, which as you know is part of the reason you need to have the people around them that are going to do all that they can for the young people like the people that we have just mentioned and all the different parties that are involved in supporting the young people that we look after its import that they are all working together to try to achieve the best outcome for that young person because when that works well then they can go as far as they possibly can without things limiting them.

Researcher: Okay thanks so do you think that there is a clear and consistent focus on education within the homes environment? Does the home promote educational learning?

Becky: Yes we always promote education positively in the homes, you know we will draw upon personal experiences when it is relevant to encourage the kids and say you know we did this and you can do that too and erm that could then help them. Staff will never speak negatively of school or college or anything because we try to encourage the young person to achieve the highest level of education that they can so yeah we always speak of school positively and if there are any issues with school or someone at school then we would encourage the young people to come to us and talk to us about it. When it appropriate contact the school directly if there is anything that could be stopping the young person form achieving anything so we try to create an open environment so that the young person can speak to us about any concerns that they may have

Researcher: Okay thanks, so do you think that schools play an active part in ensuring that the young person's needs are being met?

Becky: Yeah erm like they play a big role in ensuring that the young person receives a good level of education but they also play a part in picking up on things as well that sometimes we don't necessarily pick up on if the young person is having a particular problem erm, even with them being in the looked after system or not in the looked after system teachers and assistants in schools step up to their responsibility to help the pupils and to try and spot any potential problems whether that be problems at home or if its learning difficulties that they think might spot in the young people erm, sometimes it's easier for them to see if the young person isn't learning in a typical way or if they are struggling with something that we might not necessarily pick up on at home sometimes it's easier to see in a learning environment in school so basically they play a big role in finding out more about the young person and how to help them further their education.

Researcher: Okay thanks. So would you say that there is a good relationship between the units and the school in general?

Becky: Yeah we try to maintain a good relationship between the staff and the school. The two young people that we have currently go to the same school. They each have a book from school so every day they come home, if there is anything that school need to tell us then it will be in this book and if we need to tell school anything then we will put it in the book. This is really helpful being able just to leave messages that way but yeah we try to keep a good relationship with them because obviously if they are happy to chat with us then I suppose that makes things a lot easier, as it works well if there is good communication.

Researcher: So what can you tell me about resources available within the home then that can help the young person's learning?

Becky: I think like we don't have a lot of necessary educational resources that are available erm and you would be capable if like the kids get any home work then we would make sure that we kind of help them through that and if there was additional things that was need like the internet is great resource in being able to find study guides or additional support if the child was struggling with maths or something like that. We would get them some support that way erm we try to encourage learning in sort of practical areas like pocket money because that you know it is all maths learning and they have to figure out how much money they have and how much you need for things and so you know we try to use that kind of thing to try to stimulate their minds by playing games with them rather than them just sitting around watching TV all day.

Researcher: Okay thanks. So from your experience can you identify one main factor that hinders young people in your care from fulfilling their aspirations?

Becky: I don't know if there is a main one I think one of the main ones that they try not to let us see but would be one of the main reasons would be a lack of belief in themselves or we have the other extent of people who have an unrealistic view of themselves erm but I think often it is a lack of belief and they don't think they can do it so they don't want to try because if they try and they fail one more thing then they can often feel worse about themselves. So I think that this can often be a big thing in that they feel they are not going to be able to do it any way so why bother.

Researcher: So it is a lack of confidence and low self esteem?

Becky: Yeah it sure is.

Researcher: Okay so what do you think could be put in place to help them reach their full potential what do you think will help young people achieve their aspirations?

Becky: I don't know erm I suppose if it is a low level lack of confidence type of thing then it's about bringing in the opportunities to be in situations where they can build their confidence but again that would depend on the child whether that is putting them into youth clubs were they can make small achievements whether that's socially or doing activities and things with youth clubs. Or whether that is getting them involved in things at home where they can involved in small projects whether that is helping with the cooking or you can put in little reachable goals then if they can reach small goals then they hopefully that will start to help them to start feeling better about themselves. Unfortunately by the time we get them a lot of damage is been done and if we get them at an older age then there is not a lot we can do that is going to change their outlook on life to the point where they are going to make a big turn-around unfortunately. When we can make a difference we will try to get them to the place where they have more confidence in their abilities.

Researcher: Okay that is all thank you very much for your time and sharing your experiences with me.

Participant 3

Researcher: This is an interview with a residential care worker about the educational outcomes of children who are looked after. Is it okay to record this interview please?

Claire: Yes it is okay

Researcher: Okay thanks. The first question what can you tell me about the factors impacting upon the education of young people you look after?

Claire: I think a factor that impacts them is erm is can be family life i mean i know they are looked after but they have got a lot of issues going on while they are in care and they don't get to see their family and then i think a lot of them just think I don't want to be in care so I am not going to school. They have got no value on school because their parents didn't put value on it either. Also I think a lot of them have low self esteem as well and low confidence outside of school so when they go to school they have not got any confidence then as well.

Researcher: Do you think the lack of confidence impacts upon their performance and their learning?

Claire: Yeah

Researcher: So would you say that if the young person was having regular contact with their family that that could have a negative impact?

Claire: Yeah if the contact was not very good. You know a lot of these kids have contact and this can affect them for up to a week after, they cant sleep or they get upset then obviously they are not going to prioritise school. But you know sometimes it might not be down to contact as you can have good contacts that are positive. So it is not all down to that erm I think they have been brought up to not put value on education or learning as the family does not value school. Then they think wel i am not going to bother then.

Researcher: So you're saying it is sort of like a history that is deep rooted within the family itself?

Claire: Yeah this tends to be the case with most children in residential care. Even if the residential care workers put value on it they think well it's too late by then to really understand and obviously a lot of them have got complex needs, such as emotional behaviour difficulties erm, challenging behaviour and, or learning disabilities. For example, some young people I work with have attachment problems and if they are not going to school then some people would label them as naughty kids when actually there is a lot more to it than that as these are issues that have not been addressed early on and you feel that you are setting them up to fail in a way by putting them in the wrong environment.

Researcher: Yeah. Can I just pick on when you said 'labelling' can you explain a little bit about what you meant by that please?

Claire: Yeah say you have got like a child who goes in to school and he can be very disruptive in class then the teacher just think oh he is naughty and then the next teacher will then just listen to the teacher before and then befo0re you know it you have got everyone in the school just thinking that this person is being difficult for no reason when actually their not there is more about them than what they present.

Researcher: So you're saying that sometimes school have not got an understanding why they have got behavioural problems?

Claire: Yeah they are not always aware of or emphasis with the background and the trauma that most of these young people have already gone through in their short lives. I am not sure if this is one of the other questions but I feel that school don't work closely enough with erm looked after children.

Researcher: Yes that is another question, Okay thanks. We will move on to the next question. How do you think being in care influences the life chances of young people?

Claire: I think it does impact on them and that is not a criticism of the staff that work in the residential placements of foster placements but i think that they have got a lot of baggage and don't mean to sound negative but i think a lot of them have got a lot of other priorities really, they are not thinking about going to university.

Researcher: What do you think the main priorities are rather than education? What are the main worries that they tend to have?

Claire: I think that they do want to get a job so that they can get money but they don't understand how this work and the steps they need to take for in order for them to get there, they don't understand the processes of getting to that point. They just want it there and then and then I think a lot of these kids are quite lost and they don't know, I think they are more disadvantaged than kids who are in foster care.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Claire: Because of the stability foster care can offer, in residential you have got different workers coming in and going erm, and then they know deep down that they will have to move, and I think that the biggest worry then is what is going to happen at 18. In terms of like whether they are going to get their own flat. Whereas most, say a 16 year old who comes from a stable family they might have thi9er priorities as doing the A levels where these kids have got a lot more to think about haven't they, you know thinking about well where am I going to live when i am 18? And are these carers that are looking after me know still going to be there for me. But quite often they have to move on when they are 18 and then they are on their own then. So that is why I think they are disadvantaged. One kid I am working with at the moment that is exactly what is happening to her she can't concentrate on school because she is so anxious about what is happening and she has just got a leaving care worker.

Researcher: Has getting a leaving care worker helped her?

Claire: I think it will help her but before she knew about it she panicked you see. She thinks I am going to move on now and have to leave my placement.

Researcher: How long will the leaving care worker be involved for?

Claire: Till she is 18 then she has a PA until she is 21.

Researcher: Okay so support is increasing till they are at an older age?

Claire: Yeah because I think it is important that they continue to get support until they are at least 21 years old

Researcher: Okay thanks so do you think this has a negative impact on their educational achievements? If yes how?

Claire: Yeah definitely erm i think that if you have got a good residential home then the staff will put in the work with the kids to do it erm but they have got other issues, you know they are vulnerable kids and I don't mean to sound like I am saying they all are but they are vulnerable in terms of they have got other priorities like seeing their mates erm then they get involved in activities that aren't suitable, like anti- social behaviour. A lot of them just think school is boring unless you can get them interested into something.

Researcher: So a lot of it is about having time to help them as if there is a lot of stuff going on in the home then staff isn't going to be able to have the time to keep them focused on education.

Claire: Yeah that's right I think staff are too busy dealing with emergencies and can't concentrate as much on education as there is other issues going off all the time. So education gets left really. That can even be with a bright child who could do well I think they are too busy concentrating on everything else instead of that.

Researcher: What have you found to work well in supporting young people with their educational goals?

Claire: I think it is good if you can attend all the reviews and any parents evenings and things like that, such as PEP's and whatever to show the young people that you care and that you have got a good relationship with the school teachers as well.

Researcher: Sorry what do you mean by the PEP's?

Claire: Oh the Personal Education Plan.

Researcher: What does that consist of?

Claire: Oh that is like a review of the young person's education plan that happens every year, but you can bring them forward if you need to this includes people such as the social worker or the care staff and the teachers and young person will attend

but i think it is important that residential staff go as well so they can have an input as well.

Researcher: Is the PEP then to see where they are upto and what needs to be put in place if they need help to improve any areas where they are struggling?

Claire: Yeah it is to see if they are on target for their learning and to put things in place such as extra support if they have any additional needs that are identified so that they are given the best opportunity to succeed.

Researcher: So what else was you saying that works well in supporting young people?

Claire: I believe that doing work with them in the home, you know like help them with their homework if we could. We used to give them practical support, make sure that they were organised the night before and have their things ready for the next day, also sometimes we might take them to school as sometimes they could be dead nervous about going on their own if they are getting bullied or had low confidence so we would take them to school and pick them up and just encourage them really.

Researcher: Okay thanks. What things do young people speak to you about in relation to their education?

Claire: I have ever only had negative experiences of kids not going to school. I think it is all about trying to find out what they are interested in and then working on that

really you know on the strengths rather than talking about stuff that they can't really do as well. As we had one kid who was really good at drama so we kind of tuned into that and we did extra stuff around this like putting her into drama groups and singing groups to assist her with school stuff and to help build her confidence. I also think that it is good to rty and work with the school to try and like tailor the programme to meet their needs and not the other way round. You know if they are not going to attend 9 – 5 every day then try and be as flexible as you can as schools are not that flexible I don't think with the kids.

Researcher: Okay thanks. So do you think that most of the young people positive about their educational learning and future chances?

Claire: I think they all have a view on what they want to do and i think that they will be positive about wanting to get a job and stuff. But I don't think that they speak highly of education. Even though obviously most kids say I don't want to go to school but they will kind of say that and not realise the importance of it.

Researcher: Okay so what do you think residential care workers can do to help young people reach their full potential?

Claire: I think that they should really try and tune in to what they are interested in and what they are good at, I think they need a huge amount of support from residential care workers. For example I supported a girl doing volunteering work erm, doing as much stuff as you can outside of school as possible because then that way

their confidence will increase, then hopefully this will lead on to other things and help them to get more motivated.

Researcher: Okay so from your experience what would you do if the young person was refusing to attend school?

Claire: Well what we have done in the past is to use like consequences within the home and try and do like, keep school and home very similar so that it flows if you know what I mean so if they didn't go to school then obviously we would encourage them and everything else but then if they still didn't go then we would have to put a consequence in place, say like their pocket money might be reduced or they can't do an activity because you are not going to school.

Researcher: Do you find that this works usually?

Claire: It does with the younger ones more I think my experience of residential i think the only thing that really works is always the money. That is the only kind of thing that can get them motivated enough the thought of losing their money.

Researcher: Do you think that all this money that is available, such as pocket money and incentive money could have a negative affect when they do leave as they won't have all this money available to them?

Claire: Oh yes I do sometimes they think they have to go as like a chore but they don't really know why and I think residential workers will put all these consequences

in place but I think school need to be pro active and do say, i am not saying go on holiday but may be have a residential week and then if you can come in on these days the you get to go away, that type of set up or you know kids who say they don't want to go to school and thay hate the teachers but there is always some teachers that they get on with isn't there? So may be having them to set up some kind of activities for them if they are doing well.

Researcher: Who do think is responsible in ensuring that the young person receives a good level of education?

Claire: I think schools need to be really pro active and flexible because they are very much, like this is the curriculum and this is what you do. But rather than throwing them into that when you know that they are not going to get the results do it another way to suit their needs and may be when they are older they can back in to do their GCSE's. It's about keeping them interested in something and it doesn't and shouldn't have to be about exams or necessarily whether or not they are going to get an A in Maths its more something to keep them occupied and engaged with.

Researcher: So sort of like alternative programmes so if they weren't doing to well academically then they maybe they will be better at hands on experience?

Claire: Yeah definitely they need something that is achievable and where they can take small steps so that they reach their full potential and achieve something rather than nothing at all. Like one child at the moment the school aren't being very flexible and they are expecting her to do all this curriculum when she does not want to do it.

106

Sometimes they are setting them up to fail and the tasks and expectations are too high. They won't get there and it won't do them any good. They say well if this kid does it then all of the other kids will do it. But then the other kids are going to have A Levels where this kid isn't so.

Researcher: Do you think it is important to have a range of services involved to support the young people?

Claire: Yes I do I think that there should be as many people on board as possible as you have got Connexions, these can really help the young people. What is important is to have one main key worker that can be with them throughout and they can signpost them on because the kids can get confused about who is who because there is a lot of people involved, this can be like agency overload. So this one person can kid of advocate for them and then support them with a direct link throughout the whole process, the whole few years. They can be in between the home and the school as well.

Researcher: Do you think that multi-agency working works well in supporting young people?

Claire: Yeah i think it does but erm we always seem to have good relationships with school and other services. You know we tend to have good communications but I think that there is something missing. I am just thinking about other kids that I have worked with have gone on to further education and i suppose that is what it is all about often isn't

Researcher: Yeah I think it is only something like 1% go onto University.

Researcher: What do you think could be put in place to improve multi-agency working?

Claire: As I said communication is important but I think that there needs to be more input in schools so teachers are more aware of the LAC children. Some schools you might have loads who are dead clued up on it about their needs and their issues I am not labelling them all the same but you know they are more aware of this. As some schools might only have one looked after child and they don't know how to best help them as they haven't got a greater understanding of their needs and I think they are the kids that don't get as much support.

Researcher: Do they have a designated teacher for looked after children in schools?

Claire: From my experience yes they do they also have a safeguarding officer too but I still think that they need this one person to be with them throughout and to work with them to offer stability so they have a key person who they know they can go to. You know you have got the LACES team at the moment, but I feel that they should go around to schools and social care workers to highlight what they do and how to ensure that looked after young people are being supported effectively. Because we don't always understand what they do and they don't understand what we do I don't think that people get it. So if we don't get it then the kids aren't going to understand. It needs to be a lot tighter than it has been and stuff.

Researcher: Do you think that looked after children have the same opportunities as non-looked after children?

I Claire: n school do you mean? I think generally they have the same opportunities in school, I don't think that they would ever be discriminated against in that ways, like you are not coming on this trip. I think that some residential placements really try now as much as they can but i think it all comes down to the individual kid and if they don't want to take the opportunities available for them then they won't do it. I don't think they are always aware of all the opportunities. It depends if they get a good residential care worker who can get them involved and if they haven't then i guess they can miss out. Money is also a massive problem. You need money to get through life and if they leave care who is going to help them be able to continue with their education it is almost impossible for them to succeed. They have not got parents to pay for university fees and help with accommodation.

Researcher: So do you think that some young people are more motivated and want to achieve?

Claire: Oh Yes some young people aspire to do well and want to achieve. I think a lot of this is down to resilience too. But I think the majority of kids I work with think because they are classed as LAC they get treated a bit differently and I think that that needs to stop as well. There is a stigma at times for looked after children. Especially when you are trying to set them up for work experience and they put where they live and all that, they just don't get the same treatment as someone else would to be honest.

Researcher: Do you feel that there is a clear and consistent focus on education within the children's home?

Claire: I think there is because there has to be for like, it sounds awful but they are getting assessed by Ofsted so they make sure that they try and focus on it. You know you have got education as one of the Every Child Matters 5 Outcomes so they do try and focus on it but I think other things can overtake it. As I said earlier prioritising the needs sometimes there can be other things going on.

Researcher: Do you think that schools play an active part in ensuring that the young person's needs are being met?

Claire: It depends on which schools i think some schools can be more proactive if they wanted to be, I think that some teachers might not understand why they are looked after or what the experiences are for looked after children. I think a lot of them don't understand then they expect that they should be the same as everyone else and when they are not performing the same then they are like why aren't they? They should be like everyone else.

Researcher: What do you think could be done to make teachers more aware of this?

Claire: I think training sessions on looked after children, like the causes and effects of looked after children. Multi- agency training so they can speak to different

professionals and get their views and perspectives around these issues and that way they will gain a greater understanding of the complexities of children in care and how their backgrounds pre care impact upon their lives. I think that there needs to be a change as kids in residential care generally do not have good educational outcomes at all, it sounds negative but i don't think that they do. Statistics show that it is negative and there is a huge gap between the achievements of looked after and non-looked after children.

Researcher: Would you say that there a good relationship between the home and the school?

Claire: Yeah there is a good relationship between them both. We used to email quite a lot and go to meetings when we needed to, there is regular contact. They get in touch with us if the young person has not turned up for school and if there are any issues. I had a really good relationship with a college that the young person was attending and i tried to get her involved in as much as possible with the college.

Researcher: What can you tell me about the resources available within the home that help the young person's learning?

Claire: The homes have the internet and then we had a private tutor coming round and I think if the kids want to do it then they will get supported but because they don't want to do it then the support isn't there by the residential care workers. I think that some think it's not really worth it and I think from my experiences it is always other issues that take over. Like when we hand over and discuss things it is always other

issues that people talk about in handovers or in the care plan, it is never really about the education, that is left to the bottom of the pile in my experience. Not all the time but erm when we had a young person who was 17, it want like oh we need to do revision for A Levels today because there is just so much going on, we try but if we can't put it into the plan then we don't.

Researcher: Other things such as what?

Claire: You might have a lot of them who have a lot of emotional problems, i worked with a girl who had mental health problems and she was very depressed so it depends what mood she was in and whether she was well enough to do work, she was really anxious as well so she found it hard to actually get into school and then with the rest of the children they can issues like their mum and dad might be on their mind so they are more worried about what is going on in their families. These kids find it hard to plan long term and they just live on a day to day basis. You know other kids their age might be like I am going to do this and that next year but these kids don't look that far ahead they are just surviving day to day; they are scared to look ahead at the future because it is so uncertain. They worry about whether they are going to get their money or if they are going to get to go on an activity. I don't think they ever feel secure and settled so they can't relax enough to look at that so they just look at what carer is on tonight, they have a lot to worry about.

Researcher: Do you that if the young person is in a stable placement they do settle more?

Claire: Yeah I think you can get good relationships with the young people. Usually it can be three different staff on a rota which worked for some kids but not others. I think because they were quite challenging that you had to have different staff so it's all about keeping the same three people though if you could. This is so they are familiar and get used to who is going to be with them most of the time.

Researcher: What facilities are there for young people with complex needs who require additional support?

Claire: Most of it is provided through school but saying that we had one child who had really bad attachment issues, so he wouldn't go he was really really bad in school so he had to be home tutored for a bit so we did try to meet his needs that way. We actually tried to tutor him ourselves but that didn't really work well. It was better for him to be at home but it didn't really work well with the tutor either as he was that kind of, he had that many problems erm, he was in the wrong placement to be honest and he needed to sort himself out before he could move on to learning and stuff.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that hinders young people from fulfilling their aspirations?

Claire: I think it is all about the family like I said in the beginning the experiences that they have had sounds awful but may be they have set them up to fail in a way. I think if they have good contact and the mum and dad are really supportive then I think that can make a massive difference because if they are not then I think they just think

well, what is the point. It is also down to the experiences that they have had before they have come into care, that always takes priority, as if they have experienced some form of neglect or abuse then this can impact upon their education as well.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that helps young people achieve their aspirations?

Claire: Yeah it always helps if you can get them like a support worker, a residential worker and a teacher that they get on with as i think that is half the battle as if they don't get on with them then they just don't want to know full stop. So if you can get someone who can really tune into them and engage with them then it can make a massive difference.

Researcher: So appositive relationship can help make them feel more secure?

Claire: Yeah as a lot of them have never had a positive relationship before and that is key it is a one of the main things as if they feel secure then they will go out there and have a go.

Researcher: What do you suggest can be implemented in the home to support young people with their education?

Claire: A link another worker who can act like a link to introduce them to all that they need more, rather than focusing on the family and stuff, maybe focus more on what they want to do when they are older.

Researcher: Okay that's great thank you for taking part in this study I appreciate you

sharing your experiences with me.

Participant 4

Researcher: This is an interview with a residential care worker; I am just going to ask you a few questions it is really informal so if you don't understand any of the questions please just ask me to explain is it okay to record this interview?

Dave: Yeah that's fine.

Researcher: Okay thanks. Okay the first question is, what can you tell me about the factors impacting upon the education of young people who you look after?

Dave: Erm, okay the problem of young people in care is that when it comes to not going to school there is very little you can do if they don't want to go to school there is very little you can do to get them into school. As if they were at home with their mum and dad they would get grounded or there would be some type of consequence put in place and the school would then use a procedure that they could follow like for the parents could get prosecuted in the end you know if their child doesn't go to school, but because kids in care having got parents the social workers have got parental responsibility it's like book stops their type of thing.

Researcher: Yeah.

Dave: It is more difficult you know we try to put incentives in place and stuff but it doesn't always work because if the young person does not want to go to school then they won't.

Researcher: So what you're saying is that they just totally refuse to go to school.

Dave: Yes they refuse blank sorry what was the question again?

Researcher: What do you think the main factors are that hinder young people from achieving their educational goals? You know the things that might impact upon them going to school and stopping them from attending etc...

Dave: There is so many like erm, its hard as there are so many reasons really, it's difficult to say really as when I was in school it is what your mum and dad would want for you isn't it and like, the aspirations of your parents on you, for a young person in care they don't always have contact with their parents or if they do it is not always positive there is not that much emphasis on achievement it's like, a lot of young people think that they will just end up on the dole or in a flat or that type of thing,

Researcher: Yes I understand what you mean.

Dave: Yeah you know there is no-one for them really you know if you like a positive role model is needed yes exactly that's what I'm saying there is no positive role models for most of these young people.

Researcher: Okay that's brilliant, that's fine thank you very much.

Researcher: So how do you think that being in care influences the life chances of young people, do you think this is positive or negative Or a negative experience?

Dave: Well on paper and it looks good because they have so much support from different people, you know they have got carers they have teachers they have advocates they have got workers from connexions there are a lot of people all working in their favour but the reality of it is down to the young person at the end of the day and if they don't want all that and they are going to do what they want then there is not much you can do. There is very little that we can do once the young

person turns 18 you could get a young person onto a really good college course and they could be doing really well but once they turn 18 that support that's helped them through that time that gets reduced and taken away and so it's up to them then to make it work and to do it themselves. It's hard for them to make decisions and to do it themselves and doesn't always work and that's why most kids in care don't do very well because they haven't got support.

Researcher: So you're saying that they need a continuation of support when they turn 18?

Dave: Yeah because when you think about it the average person does not leave home now until they are about 24-25 years old and its getting older and this is because a lot of young people can't afford to live on their own and that's even people with a strong family support network like with Aunties and uncles, mums and dads and kids in care have not got all that and like they are expected to go and live in a flat at 18 and have to fend for themselves it just does not work.

Researcher: I know it is a shock when young people go to it independent living. You have answered some of the next questions but I will ask it anyway. Okay so the next question is do you think being in care has a negative impact on educational achievements? Is there any other reasons that you can think of why being in care might impact on young people and their educational achievements and their future chances?

Dave: Yes I think the financial side is another big factor as well as lack of support as young people go from having everybody there and full time care from the moment they get up until the moment they go to bed and having someone there to push them and encourage them. It's about having someone there to get them up out of bed and

to motivate them in the morning and then someone who is there when they return from school or college. Then when they leave they go from having all of this to having nothing. Sometimes they might have someone who will come in at five o'clock in the evening for a couple of hours and then there is not much work you can do at that time or even later sometimes like nine o'clock at night for an hour and then it's nearly bedtime so really what are they going to achieve in that time? Then like they'll put these kids into a flat they don't get very much money from social funding like benefits to pay for the flat. So the flats that they are getting tend to be in poor areas where they start mixing with the wrong people. It is all down to money at the end of the day and what's available so it's really hard for them and there is nothing you can do.

Researcher: Okay, that must be really frustrating for you. So do find in your experience that the kids that you have been caring for, do you think that they do better if they are in steady placements and they have the same workers you know the same key workers?

Dave: Yeah definitely consistency really helps I don't mean to sound negative and pessimistic but it does make you feel that way. You know you do all this work for example I was working with one young person who was in a residential school for kids who have learning disabilities and he didn't really suit that environment as the difficulties there were more extreme then he was, so we managed to get him into mainstream college and he really enjoyed this and he was doing quite well and this was because we were encouraging him and we were supporting him, but as soon as he got into a flat and our support got reduced he just started to fail and in the end he got kicked off his course in the end. If he had more support say like from 18 – 21 and it was continued instead of getting cut straight away again it's all down to funding.

But local councils just haven't got the money to keep doing it. So they are kind of doomed. It sounds terrible but you kind of get that way after you have worked in this type of role for so long and you see exactly what's going to happen and the kids even when they are doing really really well they get to 16 and that is when they start the decline and they know themselves that when they turn 18 they are going to go into a flat by themselves.

Researcher: So when they go into the flat is there anyone that goes into support them? Or do they not get any support at all?

Dave: it just depends like in the past we've moved over with them in to the flat and done a transition period for a couple months, but then it's all down to funding as this can't last forever. So for example the last young person I worked with they moved into the flat and then that was it. It sounds terrible but that is just how it is. We just can't have anything to do with them and it is terrible but that's just the way it is.

Researcher: So do you give them information and signpost them to services that might be to help them such as Adult services?

Dave: There is a lot available but it just about knows about it, it's not like they get an instruction manual the day they leave saying if this does not work out then you can do this. Because once they get that knock down from any type of placement or job interview or whatever to it is kind of like what is the point? It's kind of like putting them all into one category but when you look at the statistics of kids in care and what they achieve and it's very little. It's terrible, it's only something like less than 1% of young people in care go to university and that's very shocking.

Researcher: It is especially when you have got the Leaving Care Act and things like that that supposed to help these young people.

Dave: I know from my experience it doesn't really help them at all. Things need to change; more money is needed to help them make smooth transitions into adulthood.

Researcher: Okay thanks so the next question in your experience what have you find to work well and what have you found helps to support young people with their educational goals what do you think helps form your input?

Dave: I found that when they introduced EMA and that was to help and to encourage young people to stay on at six form or college it's not just the young people in care it was for all young people. I think that was a good incentive put in place as it encouraged young people to attend education and carry on with their education. For example the young person I work with at the moment he really struggles going to school so we have got an incentive in place for him at the moment, so if he has a full week in school then he can earn an extra £10 but that is quite strict as if he doesn't go then he will lose his privileges. A lot of people might criticise this but at the end of the day what you want is for the kids to go to school so if you've got to pay them to go then I think that's the way it is as it will benefit them in the future, but once they get to school it's the support they get in school. Like this young person when he is in school he is doing very little. It's hard.

Researcher: Would you say that this has always been the case for this particular young person? Has this always been an issue?

Dave: Yeah his attendance has always been erratic and that is the case for a lot of young people. It's more that when he is there he's just refusing to do any work; well this has always been the case of this particular young person as he has been a history of poor school attendance before he came into care and as I said before this applies to the majority of young people who come into our care.

Researcher: Do they say why they don't want to go into school?

Dave: It doesn't matter what you say to the young people even if you say why don't you want to go to school? Most of the time they make lazy excuses or they just simply say I can't be bothered or it's none of your business.

Researcher: So it doesn't matter what you try and do to support that they just make up excuses?

Dave: You'd still try to support them with but generally it does just fall on deaf ears and if they decide there are not going then there is nothing you can do. I mean there are consequence that we will put in place for them, for example if he doesn't go to school one day he will lose two pounds from that weekly incentive and his television will be removed. And that day he can't have any visitors and he can't have his phone till like 3:30 and stuff like that. If he doesn't go a second day then he will lose his incentive for the week and his privileges for a week as well. I mean each young person is different, for some young people who aren't bothered about money then money is not big motivator for this young person because he doesn't smoke go out with his friends, he does not drink or anything like that. So that might work for another young person that smokes and likes to socialise or drink so it does depends if they like to socialise with other young people are not. Obviously this is all specific

to that young person each young person will have different plans and different consequences may be used and put in place if the young person continues to refuse.

Researcher: Okay thank you erm, so what things can you tell me that young people speak to you about in their education? Do they talk to you about exams or what they enjoy doing at school or things that want to do after school?

Dave: We will support them in all areas erm, the last young person I worked with came to me saying he wanted to be a chef then I looked into all what they need to enable them to be able to look at this and the route they need to take in order for them to achieve this. We do have good staff team here and everyone is really efficient they do go that extra mile to help the young people and like if there was an interview for example the young person I look after now has got his exams in June so from the end of June till September, he is starting a college course in September hopefully so in those couple of months he will be at a bit of a loose end to be honest. So we have managed to speak to connexions and they do a thing called a national citizen service which is a three-week programme and they go out of borough for weekends and do activities to this helps them keep occupied and motivated while not in school in keeping them busy and getting him to do some work experience. For example he did some work experience at a nursery so we are going to get in touch with them to see if there is anything he can do there as well just to keep him busy.

Researcher: That's great.

Dave: This type of job you can't just come in and switch off you have got to like try to motivate young people when they don't want do anything but you have just got to try and do it yourself.

Researcher: So does this young person needs his GCSEs to get onto this course?

Dave: I think it's an unconditional offer to be honest he will get onto and then they will do his maths and English with him if he hasn't got it. So it's not too bad because if he doesn't do too well in his GCSEs he can go on and redo them again.

Researcher: That's good. So overall do you think young people are positive about school and education?

Dave: Erm, I don't know really.

Researcher: Do you think they look forward to their future are they positive about future life chances?

Dave: In my experience I think young people can be quite negative I don't think they all look I forward to the future. I think it's probably mixed really, you could have all these hopes and dreams and stuff but the reality is if you haven't got the money or to support to do all these things then it must affect your attitude towards life. Like when I was younger I lived at home I knew I had my mum and dad there for me so I could do just do what to try and do, but when you haven't got that support and your child who is in care this must have a massive impact on you as they don't have that support.

Researcher: Okay so what do you think residential care workers can do to help young people to reach their full potential?

Dave: As I have already said I think that providing support and going that extra mile and looking into things that they are interested in. You know finding a different angle to approach things from and find incentives and things because at the end of the day education is the most important thing. Rewards and positive praise is key and also

ensuring that they are realistic. It's like you're working towards a finishing line that's quite close, you know what I mean as they have only got until there are 18 to sort these kids out. Well it's not even that it's like 17 ½,

Researcher: Yeah and they are getting ready?

Dave: Yeah and like those years when you're a teenager its hard enough growing up as teenager anyway without having all of the issues that you've got and these kids have got that times ten. You know they have come from homes of domestic violence or abuse and many have been abused themselves, you have all this stuff going on in their heads. Then they are expected to make massive decisions about their future its crazy.

Researcher: Yes I understand it must be very hard as they have all this stuff going on in their heads. It's hard on children when they have got all this extra stuff to contend with.

Dave: You know it's hard making those decisions when you come from a normal background when you are supported and your home environment is stable.

Researcher: Okay thanks, that's great erm, so you mentioned before about a young person who is refusing to attend school so I don't know whether there is anything more that you want to add about that? And what you do if they do refuse to attend? Are you able to work with the school?

Dave: Oh yes we will ring every day and liaise with school to make sure that the young person is in school and that they have attended.

Researcher: Okay thank you. So whose responsibility do you think it is to ensure that the young person receives a good level of education?

Dave: it is everyone's responsibility, it's our responsibility as carers to make sure that the there and then the school's responsibility when they are in school to ensure that they get educated while there. So everybody involved even the parents if their involved. Obviously dependent on contact whether or not they still see them that's why I sometimes I speak to people and the think that's it's bad to have cash incentives to encourage them to go to school but we got to think about if you don't go then the opportunities that could be there for them are going to be really limited so I would rather pay them to go to school and make sure that they get a good education than just give them nothing and just let them get on with it.

Researcher: Okay thanks. Do think it's important to have a range of services involved to support young people.

Dave: Yes there is a good amount of support available to young people in general and young people in care think that they get extra support as well. It's Just at the end of the day as I said before it's down to the young person and if they don't want to do something then they are not going to do. It and it doesn't matter what you do or what you say it's their decision at the end of the day. It is sad but that goes back to the moment they are born if you are born into a family that is damaged then it will kind of affect you for the rest of your life. You know if you look at statistics generally kids in care don't do very well this is because they don't have the best start in life.

Researcher: So do you think that family functioning and history impacts on the attitude of the young person and how they feel about their education?

Dave: Yeah that's what I am saying and what they have experienced of school affects the young person and if they did not value education then it is highly likely that the young person won't value education and nine times out of 10 they don't

126

value it. It's hard because it sounds dead negative but the reality is that's just the way of the world and then what will happen is that these kids will go on to offend and go to prison or they will have their own kids and they will get into the same cycle and then it's never ending half of the parents who've got kids in care probably have had some type of experience of being in care themselves it is like a never ending cycle. Until there is some type legislation put in place that actually helps young people leaving care that is not going to be reduced when your 18 and there will be something available to you post 18.

Researcher: So support needs to be put in place and to remain in place for a number of years and then at least then the young person knows that there is something available for them when they leave care.

Dave: Yeah you know even the organisation I work for, if we had like a unit or some type of support unit that can specifically help the transition for young people up until the age of 21/22. But it just doesn't happen because it is all down to funding, because its government money.

Researcher: Okay thanks thinking about the next question do you think that looked at children can have the same opportunities as none looked after children? I know you mentioned a lot about statistics but from your experience do you think that they can have the same opportunities as none looked after children?

Dave: oh yeah I think that they get a lot of opportunities probably more opportunities than non looked after children get like the young people who we look after get their pocket money, they get clothing allowance, they get Internet top ups, mobile top ups, they could earn up to £60-£70 a week that's all great throwing money and that is all that's available to them but a lot of the kids care are like typical teenagers anyway

and they will use that. But what they want and need is the emotional warmth and love that money can't buy. You know money can't buy these things you know how can you substitute a warm loving environment. You know emotional stability, safety, love and warmth are more important but unfortunately a lot of kids in care didn't get this at home anyway. You know one of the young people I looked up look after he has been able to go to Lippa which is a performing arts school. He has had the chance to do this when if he was at home then he probably wouldn't have been given this opportunity.

The young people have has all these different things and are able to go on holiday and go on trips and do different stuff but if he was at home with his family none of this would ever of happened. So they do kind of get more of opportunities.

Researcher: So does the young person still go to all these activities and the dance Academy?

Dave: Yeah well he was going to music lessons but that's been cancelled now as he sort of lost interest but there is money available to do stuff and things like this, when they are in care they have all this but the support but once they get a 16-17 years old you have to start reducing this and I don't understand why! It does not make sense to me it is so hard as you kind of wrap them in cotton wool to a point and then say actually no this is what's going to happen now and it is all in such a short period of time, so it's a massive shock to the system you know yourself there is no way I could live on my own when I was 18. I struggle now and I have a full-time job I have a decent education and a bit of common sense anyway, I never had any problems when I was growing up and I still struggle now and it's not getting any easier. It's very difficult at the moment and it is very difficult now even though I have a job, there

is hardly any jobs out there, it is the way the country is at the moment it's not that great and you keep encouraging people to go to university and that's amazing but there is no jobs when you get out of there so instead you have a generation of people who come and out of university with about 40 grand's worth of debt and no job and go back to live with their mum and dad, so it's kind of like what chance of these young people who have been in residential care and who are looked after, you know what chance have they got? It is very messed up the way they do things.

Researcher: Yeah I know what you mean it is very difficult out there for young people in general.

Researcher: So within the home environment itself is there a clear and consistent focus on education? Is the staff quite consistent in their approach towards encouraging education?

Dave: Oh yes we could just be like right well he is not going to school sound but we don't we put incentives in place, other house will try different things and they don't always work, you know the young person is like your bribing me to go to school but realistically you shouldn't have to pay him any way it's the law, you know it's like nothing happens any way as you can't prosecute them as its the Local Authority , it's like a catch 22 the la have got parental responsibility but we can't prosecute the Local Authority for something like that so it doesn't make sense you can quite happily drag parents through court. This needs to be looked at it doesn't make any sense.

Researcher: Is he marked as unauthorised absence as he if refuses to go in to school?

Dave: Yeah we won't make excuses up for him we just tell school that he is refusing and he is marked as truanting.

Researcher: What is his school attendance like? Have you got a rough idea of the figure?

Dave: It depends as it is different each term so like last term was pretty good because it was going really well but this term it is probably about 80-90 per cent something like that for that term from January to Easter. However, that probably would have been a good term but since going back in Easter he hasn't hardly been in very much

Researcher: Do you think that the break hasn't helped the situation?

Dave: Probably yeah as he had two weeks off and then he had a lot of issues with his mum and the problems that she is going through as affected him as well there is always loads going on in their lives that affect them.

Researcher: I know okay thanks, so do you think that school plays an active part in ensuring that the young person's needs are being met, are they understanding to their situations?

Dave: I think so yeah because like schools play a massive part in a young person's life now, don't they? I think we have good communication with the school and they attend LAC Meetings and they update us on a weekly basis and we speak to them every day. They are pretty good. Like when I was in school they had parents evening once a year, unless there was any major issues then that is what it was like. You know they are part of the care plan for the young person and they have a duty to address any issues. We do have a good relationship with the school.

130

Researcher: What resources do you have available within the home to help the young people with their learning? I know you mentioned the internet but is there any other materials you may use to help the young person?

Dave: There is the local library. If he needs any books then we go there. It is about communicating with schools and checking if there is anything he needs then we make sure he has it.

Researcher: Do they ever do any research or projects on the internet for school?

Dave: No most young people don't do home work or they say they haven't got any homework, often they refuse to do it. To be honest school is pretty good now and he has got his exams coming up so there is lots of extra revision clubs at the weekend and after school and stuff like that so there is a lot of emphasis put on revision and getting it right. They get a few goes anyway it's not like it is all down to the one exam at the end of school they are like doing it throughout the year aren't they?

Researcher: Yeah has he been predicted any grades yet?

Dave: I think so the highest is a grade C then the rest are like D's and E grades but that is down to his school attendance because he never goes. It is vital. Since January has done quite well so the last four months he was doing well and then this month since April he is up and down with it. But before that he has always been up and down any way.

Researcher: Does he finish soon for study leave?

Dave: Yeah the end of May he finishes then his exams are in June and then that is it he is done.

Researcher: Does he say that he will sit his exams?

Dave: I hope so. It is just down to him at the end of the day isn't it?

Researcher: So he knows when they are?

Dave: Oh yeah we have got them all down in a diary. He could have a place in Oxford University but if he doesn't want to go or he doesn't want to do it then he won't there is not much anyone can do about it. It is all down to motivation and self belief.

Researcher: So what would you say the main factor is hindering young people in residential care from fulfilling their aspirations?

Dave: I suppose it is your start in life and your experience and what you choose to do with it. It also depends on what choices you are given and what choices you make, and realising what choices you make are going to affect you for the rest of your life. Some people can make bad choices when they are growing up and they have got a good family support network so its okay because they can have other chances. But these kids they haven't really got that and if they don't make the most of it this time then there is no one going to be there to get you back, there is no safety net and I know if all else fails for me say I lost my job, I was ill or whatever then I have got my parents and family there to support me through any tough times these kids haven't always got that, they don't have that support network and they are on their own. They think what's the point is because no one cares. To be honest if it was me I would be like well why should I care, no one is bothered about me so why should I care? And the kids, especially when it comes to like friends a lot of these kids haven't got good friends and they are not very good with their social skills and

stuff. The friends that they do have their aspirations are pretty much the same as them as so it's not like I want to be like David Beckham or anything like that it like I want to be like Dave round the corner who has a council flat and a dog and gets a weed every week.

Researcher: They don't see the bigger picture. When you mentioned friends do you think a lot of it is peer pressure?

Dave: It could be peer pressure it could be lack of peer pressure, it goes both ways as you could have friends that try to encourage you to do one thing then you could have friends who also try to get you to do something else. Or you could have no friends at all and then have to leave school and go somewhere where you don't anybody for example college and a lot of these kids have got issues with building friendships and relationships.

Researcher: The last question is what can you suggest that should be implemented within the home to support young people with their education?

Dave: I think like I said before about extending the support post 18, maybe a unit that can offer support until they are 21. Money is the key factor, you can have all of these amazing ideas and talk until the cows come home but if the money is not there for it then you're wasting your time. When you have a child your responsibility is not over when they turn 18 you are going to be responsible for them for the rest of your life most people still tap the mum and dad for like £20 from time to time don't they? Social services and the government don't seem to get that and it's like they are 18 they are adults now come get out and be on your merry way.

Researcher: I know, okay that's great thank you very much for your time I really appreciate you taking part in this study and answering the questions.

Interview – Participant 5

Researcher: This is an interview with a residential care worker about the educational outcomes of looked after children. Is it okay to record this interview?

Danny: Yes it is.

Researcher: What can you tell me about the factors impacting upon the education of young people you look after?

Danny: Well there are a lot of factors I mean firstly within the education system itself you have got to talk about the way in which the learning level of a child is gauged the way that is assessed and what is appropriate for them and what they should be learning and whether they are at the appropriate age to be learning material. You have also got other factors such as home, the child maybe in a situation where the family are quite poverty stricken which can be another thing as well that can link on to other children noticing which can lead on to bullying and low self esteem, low self worth and that in itself can be counterproductive to the child's development because the lower they feel about themselves the less inclined they are to feel that they are able to achieve certain things. Other factors also actually involve the actual care environment that the child has been brought up in fpr example whether it is a home family environment or a care home or foster care. Statistics also show that a lot of children brought up in care tend to be more inclined to fall into the category of lower education and more unlikely to go to further education and so on. I think that one of

the most recent statistics show that out of all the young people that attended university only 1% of children from care actually attend.

Researcher: Thank you that's great you have given me loads of factors there is a lot of different ones as you have said that impact on their lives. I know you talked a lot about statistics but do you thinks that it has a positive or negative experience. You know how do you think being in care influences the life chances of young people?

Danny: Well statistics only tell part of the story in terms of if you think about the reflection of a child being in care the fact that they don't go on to further education is not always the correct reflection of a care home necessarily maybe it is case of them having a kind of disjointed transitional period of their life you know they may have gone from care home to care home or foster carer to foster carer which then has a knock on affect as well but can also influence hopefully the majority of the time influence them for the better if they come from an abusive background or a background where they are not being looked after properly whether it be physical or emotional needs anything like that. I can probably speak from experience where i can genuinely say that young people and children that I have worked with all genuinely much better off in the care home than they have been in the home environment.

Researcher: Do you think this has a negative impact on their educational achievements?

Danny: What being in care?

Researcher: Yeah.

Danny: Yeah I would say it can do, again it depends as if they comes from an environment where their parents aren't too concerned about their education then on the other hand erm, they could also go to a care home but they might have been in the system for so long that they get that stigma were they don't do well in school and they don't feel the need to do well in school as well and on the flip side of the coin of cause you have times when they have come into care and the care home is just right for them and they have been given the opportunities and the facilities to achieve more than they would have anywhere else.

Researcher: Okay so you are saying that there is a stigma can you explain a little bit more about this please?

Danny: Just from the experience of working with young people in care there are sometimes a lot of young people who feel embarrassed or ashamed of saying that they are in care because this may mean that there is some sort of failing on the families part in which case it reflects on them erm which is another thing about the inherent stigma that comes with it which again can lead to the young person being bullied and possibly not want to go to school and then having a knock on affect on their education because they are not spending enough time there.

Researcher: Okay that is great, thanks. So in your opinion what have you found to work well in supporting young people with their educational goals?

Danny: There is a variety of things obviously always depending on the young person's background and where they have come from and different things work for different young people. I would say that a constant with young people is giving them a reason to want to go to education and not just tell them that they have to go and it is a legal requirement but explain to them why they should be there and what the qualifications mean for them in the future in terms of their independence, employment and further education and how it enriches their life in general.

Researcher: So enabling them to see the bigger picture and the benefits and what they could get out of it if they go to education

Participant- Yeah i mean pretty much about giving them a glimpse of what they could achieve for example a lot of these children and young people do come from broken families and broken homes were further education and employment hasn't been the norm in their life so they don't actually know or are aware of what

Researcher: So what things do young people speak to you about in relation to their education?

Danny: Again it depends some of the young people i work with have consistent problems attending education whether it be because of behavioural problems or whether it be because they have been moved around that many times that the level of inconsistency affects them daily then they don't feel it is worth it and they don't see any pay off for it.

Researcher: so what do you think helps them to be able to talk to you about their educational learning?

Danny: Constantly reinforcing and being positive, also creative criticism when necessary as well letting them know that they are doing well but these are areas that they could still improve in and again explaining why they should be doing it in the first place of course you have idea that a lot of these young people are teenagers and monitory rewards are always good, like money incentives and activity money incentives and things like that.

Researcher: Okay thanks sorry just going back to the question what do young people speak to you about school and educational learning is there any specific things they talk about like lessons and exam worries etc...

Danny: It depends some young people don't really like to talk about school and others will openly tell you about their day. I think a lot of young people don't really want you to know what they are up to and tend to say yeah school is okay, when later on you may find that there had been a problem, or something had happened but they don't tell you it is a teacher or learning mentor that tells you.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Danny: I am not sure I think that they don't really want you to know I think they struggle to manage their feelings and emotions and are not always able to

communicate their version of what has happened. It is important to listen to them and encourage them to talk about what is going on at school.

Researcher: Yes definitely. Okay the next question is, overall would you say that the young people are positive about their educational learning and future chances?

Danny: I would say that it is a mixed bag as the system that we work in is one of which were the young people who comes to us is because they have been let down and unfortunately a lot of the time the education is the first thing to suffer again with them being moved from one place to another and starting a new school and so on and basically changing the way in which they live in general is always a big factor so I found for the most part that children in care do have a more difficult time with regards to their education but a lot of the time it can be turned around.

Researcher: Just picking up on when you said they had been moved around a lot do you find that if the young people remain in one or two stable placements this helps them create more positive hopes for the future?

Danny: Yes definitely I think that is one of the tough things about a child in care especially if they have got problems in the past then its finding a an educational placement which their going to fit in to not necessarily putting them in a school because that is a legal requirement but using research and asking the young person what they want in order to find the necessary placement because it may all be well and good finding them a good school to go to but if a young person struggles with certain subjects and its more academic obviously if you ask them what they want to

do and its more of a vocational type of thing such as joinery or whatever else then you can help them to apply themselves a little more and if it is something they are good at and they enjoy then they are going to be inclined to do more and to better themselves i think.

Researcher: Yeah, okay thanks. Do you think that there should be more vocational courses available for young people in care?

Danny: Yes because not everyone is academic and I think as long as you can keep a young person engaged and they are learning key life skills then that's the main thing. These courses can lead on to good trades and employment opportunities for young people in the future.

Researcher: What do you think residential care workers can do to help young people reach their full potential?

Danny: I would say that it is continuous dialogue whether that be you know formal YP meetings or just general conversations and asking them what they want because there is no point in trying to force a young person to go to school or tell them that they have to go to school without giving them the reasons behind it so if you can continuously give them positive reinforcement and remind them what they are trying to achieve and why they are trying to achieve it and that it is in the long run all for them and it's for their benefit then hopefully a lot of the time if you do it enough then it will hit home.

Researcher: Just picking up on when t=you said YP meetings does that mean young person's meetings?

Danny: It is yes.

Researcher: Can you explain a little bit about these meetings and what they are for please?

Danny: Yes they are meetings to discuss with the young person where they are up to. It is an opportunity for them to raise any issues or just as equally any positives that they feel about and it gives us an opportunity to change or review policies or to generally just have a chat with the young person formally or informal depending upon the young person and how inclined they are to engage with you.

Researcher: That's excellent thanks.

Researcher: So from your experience what do you do if the young person was refusing to attend school?

Danny: If the young person was refusing to attend school first you would want to ascertain why they didn't want to attend school first, whether it is because of bullying or are they having difficulty doing the work or whether it just be quite simply that they don't want to go and they don't see the point in going or doing the work. Once you have kind of ascertained why they are not going then you take the appropriate action for example, if they are being bullied then you would probably contact the school and

see what can be done about that and then you would work and liaise with the school any key workers or teachers if it was just generally because the young person does not see the point in it and doesn't see what they have got to achieve then I would say it is probably just again sitting them down and kind of going through the benefits of it again and the consequences of not getting a decent education and not being able to find employment and the affect that this will then have to generate cash flow to buy the things they like and just explaining it like that.

Researcher: So is there any consequences that the homes would use if the young person was refusing and they said that they didn't want to go and they couldn't be bothered?

Danny: Yeah, the young person I work with at the moment one or two incentives work with him then he gets a weekly incentive with regards to how often he goes to school, how often he comes in on time and how often he showers through the week. It's not only a case of giving him the money it is again explaining why these things are necessary so that hopefully in the future the incentives will no longer be necessary and they realise that these things they are doing will improve positivity in their own lives and then again constantly reminding them that if they want nice things in the future, for example one of the young people we look after likes his clothes and he likes expensive things he has got expensive taste, so I explain to him that when he becomes a certain age that won't be available to him any more so it is going to be down to him to maintain his life style. As once they leave then the support is a lot less and it's a hard thing to explain to a young person as well because they don't tend to think too far ahead in to the future so when they turn 18 and they go through

the transition to adult services a lot of the time it's too little too late when they realise that the help is not there for them any more so it is kind of getting it drilled into them as early as possible.

Researcher: So your role is trying to prepare them for that?

Danny: Yes to help them to develop all of their independent skills from looking after themselves generally to going shopping and living in a house and to finding employment and things like that.

Researcher: Who do think is responsible in ensuring that the young person receives a good level of education?

Danny: I would say all of the invested parties are, you know you like at the Children Act and the way it has been recently updated with the every child matters situation and you look at this kind of multi-agency networking system now with social workers and advocates who liaise with key workers as well were you have these meetings regularly were you can exchange ideas and prepare for any kind of incidents or issue that might be there to do with the child in so in which case you are essentially pooling your ideas and can come up with them together and it shares the level of responsibility and gives you access to more resources as well you know the ones that might not necessarily be able to access then you could to a social worker and ask if there are any kind of outside agencies that could talk to the young person.

Researcher: So do you think there are a lot of benefits to multi-agency working?

Danny: Oh yes definitely it's not even just a case of the resources themselves it's just general advise you know it's always good to have people from the health service that work with the young people but in a different capacity so you can get their ideas on things and you can use a little bit of trial and error to see what works.

Researcher: I think you have pretty much covered the next question about whether you think it is important to have a range of services involved to support the young people, is there anything else you would like to add before we move on to the next question?

Danny: No that's pretty much it I think.

Researcher: Okay thanks. Do you think that looked after children have the same opportunities as non-looked after children?

Danny: Yeah I think that they can I mean it is always going to be a little bit more stringent as in the care system everything is a little bit more regulated as well and that's always going to be the case. It is unfortunate but it is necessary for general health and safety and safeguarding of the young person. I do think that it may not be the case a 100 per cent now after mentioning some of the statistics before regards to the young people going on to further education and gaining employment but I do think that it is possible and whether that just be one in so many number of children there are ways to develop and improve it as well.

Researcher: Do you feel that there is a clear and consistent focus on education within the home?

Danny: Yes that is a primary factor especially with regards to the young people that I work with at the moment the two in particular were educational placements has been like the priority regards to them remaining in Borough and a lot of the time the Local Authority do tend to jump on that a lot more quickly if the young person isn't getting an education then they feel that the placement is not working so therefore they need to be moved and I think that to an extent that is right to have education as the primary concern because maybe up there with safeguarding and things like that but without education we already know that a lot of the looked after young people will end up in the prison System and again 51 % of the prison population in the UK at the moment have spent periods of time in care at one point or another so I think that it is a point of changing that round as well.

Researcher: Do you think that schools play an active part in ensuring that the young person's needs are being met?

Danny: I would say for the most part of it yeah but in my experience especially working with young people who have been placed in specialist schools were they do academic some days and vocational stuff other days they are more specifically affected because the young people do tend to have key workers that care staff can liaise with and speak about and it is a lot more of a focused approach for example if a young person does not turn up for school then the young person's key worker will be straight on the phone to alert care staff then you can kind of discuss the

appropriate options or actions to take with regards to it so I think in most situations especially with regards to specialist schools then they do take an interest and they are quite effective.

Researcher: Would you say that there a good relationship between the home and the school?

Danny: Yes I would we usually remain in contact at least once a week providing that the young person has attended school but if the young person hasn't attended school then we usually receive a phone call that morning to notify us. Or if they have attended and they have been particularly difficult or ill behaved then there will be a discussion over what it was over and what the outcome is and what can be done to prevent this from happening in the future. So you are constantly building as every time there is an incident you can discuss it and take it from there.

Researcher: What can you tell me about the resources available within the home that help the young person's learning?

Researcher: What facilities are there for young people with complex needs who require additional support?

Danny: Often there is funding and things like that and there are a lot of activities that can be considered therapeutic and educational as well so if you are able to find that balance then again when it becomes to behavioural tactics its finding something positive for that young person and something that they particularly enjoy so that they

will be more inclined to want to do and less inclined to want to jeopardise so if it is something positive that they really enjoy doing then this can be a reward for them. Everyone wins then you know the young person gets the rewards and their education value of the activity and the engagement with staff and that then helps to develop the relationship between the two them. The stringer the relationship between carer and young person the more likely they are to succeed. Ehen a young person you look after acknowledges your disappointment in them that's when you know you have made progress.

Researcher: In terms of when you say to them you are a bit gutted that didn't do something that was expected of them or they have let themselves down. Do they know that your concerned and do they try to improve on that so that you feel a bit more happier about what they have done?

Danny: Yes it is nice to move away from the idea of them feeling they have lost money as oppose to that they may have lost a little bit of your respect if you can keep it on par with that then that again prepares them for things later in life where that is an incentive to them especially kids who have social and emotional difficulties then engaging with others if they are more able to acknowledge peoples disappointment or emotions then they are more able to avoid certain situations.

Researcher: Yeah they are more likely to recognise that, like a parent would do if they care about your feelings on how they are getting on?

Danny: Yeah exactly that's when you know kind of know that you have made some kind of progress, as you know that sometimes this is a kid that has had problems

with people in authority whether that it be the family has let them down or the school has let them down then you can tell that they are acknowledging what you're thinking they do value your opinion and that is when it becomes more positive.

Researcher: Yes so you are showing that you are interested in both the good and the bad times?

Danny: Yes it is important to be there at every aspect of the young person's lives the good and the bad.

Researcher: Is there any equipment or resources within the home that helps with the young person's learning?

Danny: First and foremost is the engagement with staff it is really important especially when they have got home work to do then the help is always there if they feel like they need any extra help and also the positive thing about the specialist schools is that they acknowledge that there may be some learning difficulty which will infringe on homework and even class work so there are extra facilities made available to the young people who need them. It is important that there is always who can help and guide the young person. I'd say a lot the time the hardest part is getting the young person to acknowledge that they need the help and then to take it from there.

Researcher: how would you get the young person to acknowledge it? Are there any other techniques that you find helps?

Danny: I probably wouldn't want to refer to it as horror stories but it's probably letting them know worse case scenarios of these things if they don't attend their education then they won't attend further education and a lot of well paid jobs these do require further educational learning such as a degree. So it is about letting them know not achieving GCSE's, let alone A Levels and a Degree then they have limited opportunities for employment in the future and again that is going to infringe upon their lifestyle and what they are able to do for themselves.

Researcher: Yes it is very tough at there now, it is very competitive.

Danny: Again you can always go on about the societal aspect of it as well but then there is the step further you know you may very well get by on what you earn or what you getting off benefits' but at the same time you are not going to be able to get all of the things that you really want or the things that you need. For example to be able to buy nice clothes and games consoles and televisions you know whatever it is that most young people want these days. Especially working with young males that this is the primary concern for them as they are not going to be able to afford these things in the future I think it becomes a concern for them then that even though it is a bit of a materialistic thing if that is something that prompts then to be able to carry on with their education then so be it.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that hinders young people from fulfilling their aspirations?

Danny: I would say in the case of the young person that I am working with at the moment is that is outside influences form their peers especially if it's a young person that has been in trouble with the police or easily led astray erm possibly from hanging around and associating themselves with older lads who might have a little more sense than they do and obviously they are trying to impress them and so on and that has become a constant and some of the young people that I work with erm these few young people have had problems, mainly family problems and attachment issues in the past and a lot of the time they just want to be accepted and so they are willing to do anything for it and we have had incidents where they have kind of influenced the young person not to go to school and not to this and that and they will value their opinion as they don't want to disappoint they want a friend and they consider these people to be their friends. So when in fact they just want to be able to have someone who they can tell what to do so I would say it is probably the more external influences depending on where the young person is from and who they associate with.

Researcher: Yes I agree its peer pressure. Can you explain a little bit more about attachment issues?

Danny: Yes they come from backgrounds were they had very poor attachments with family members, you know when they are babies and they have not always had someone who is there for them or available for them to have a secure attachment. This could be down to neglect and abuse where the child's needs are not met appropriately these can then cause problems in later life and the young person develops trust issues. The majority of our kids have attachment issues although

some can be resilient and   can allow people in their lives such as care workers and teachers who they trust.

Researcher: Okay thanks. From your experience can you identify one main factor that helps young people achieving their aspirations?

Danny: As I mentioned before constant support for the young person and helping to achieve and reach their full potential. Having someone who believes in them and who encourages them to do well.

Researcher: What do you suggest can be implemented in the home to support young people with their education?

Danny: I would say again firstly assessing the young person what they want form their education you know what they feel would benefit from their education whether that be a specific subject or a specific class then look for extracurricular activities you know if it is a young person who likes joinery or if they are fascinated by mechanics or cookery or things like that then engage them with activities that they can enjoy and kind of experience things first hand as well and make them more able to see what their potential is and what they can achieve. And again to improve multi-agency communication and ensuring that everyone is on the same page and you can't really go wrong as if you got everyone that is singing from the same hymn sheet and they are getting this from all angels everyday then it is more likely to set in with them and they are more likely to be inclined to do it.

Researcher: Okay thank you. That is the last of the questions is there anything else you would like to add?

Danny: No that is everything that was really straight forward thanks.

Researcher: Thank you for taking part in this study.

Interview – Participant 6

Researcher: This is an interview with a residential care worker. Is it okay to record this interview?

Fliss: Yes it is.

Researcher: What can you tell me about the factors impacting upon the education of young people you look after?

Fliss: Do you mean basically what hinders them?

Researcher: Yes

Fliss: Well in my experience most of the young people who come into our care have poor education attendance this could be for many reasons, mainly this could be down to the family lifestyle, issues at home erm, by the time they have come into care they have missed that much time at school that when they do go to school they feel that they stand out so then obviously it is our job then to get them back into education which is hard because they feel like they stand out a mile.

Researcher: Okay thank you. Are there any other things that you think might affect their education whilst they are in your care?

Fliss: Peer pressure, families, like i said they might have missed that much of school that you know they are not academically as able as other young people their age

who have a good school attendance. A lot of them have fallen behind with their education as they have fallen behind, in their eyes they stand out you know there mates could be in a higher set and they could be in the bottom set because they have missed that much school, this puts them off from going in.

Researcher: Do you find that a lot of young people who come into the care system have had a lot of school placements and been moved around a lot?

Fliss: Yes a lot of our young people are EBD schools.

Researcher: Sorry what does that stand for?

Fliss: Emotional and behavioural schools because they haven't been able to sustain mainstream schools for whatever reason and then they end up in the EBD school difficulties then once they go to the EBD schools there are kids who have different issues within that school then that is a disadvantage straight away.

Researcher: So why do you think that it is a disadvantage?

Fliss: Because they can get in with the wrong crowd and learn new behaviours, you know start doing something that they had not previously done before and they can begin getting into trouble more, some end up getting into trouble with the police and have been cautioned and so on.

Researcher: Okay thanks.

Researcher: How do you think being in care influences the life chances of young people?

Fliss: I think it's what they make it isn't it? I think it is our job to try and enable them to have as much opportunity as everyone else; it is whether they choose to do that at the end of the day. If we are going by statistics then a lot of people in care don't do very well. I think there is also a stigma of being in care for example we have a young person who is embarrassed to bring his mates round and even though we try to make it as comfortable as possible and we say look unfortunately we have got to be here and you can go in the front room with your mates but as long as the door is open that's okay but it is the fact that if his mates know that he is in care. You know it is a beautiful home there is nothing wrong with it but it is the way he looks at it you know he has staff looking after him not parents like his friends have. It's not our fault we try and encourage him to bring his friends round but its hard for him, I would probably feel the same too if it was me it's difficult being a teenager as it is never mind being a looked after teenager as they have a lot more worries.

Researcher: What is your understanding of the statistics?

Fliss: Well you know a lot of the young people who are in care or have been in care achieve poor educational outcomes and this impacts upon their future, in terms of many are not in education, employment or training. Many of whom are more likely to end up in the prison system; homeless or likely to go on to have children who will also end up in the care system. It's very sad but it does have a negative impact.

Researcher: Okay thanks

Researcher: Do you think this has a negative impact on their educational achievements? If yes how?

Fliss: It shouldn't do but it does because like I say a lot of young people for example if you look at those who go to EBD schools a lot of them are kids in care. There is more kids in care than not and it shouldn't do but it does.

Researcher: Why do you think that a lot of looked after children end up in EBD schools?

Fliss: Because of the difficulties that they experience before coming in to care you know a lot of these kids end up in care because of some sort of neglect, abuse or trauma, they have experienced a lot of lose and have poor attachments as a result of this. One young person has post traumatic stress disorder due to experiencing domestic violence when he was younger, his concentration has deeply been affected and he struggles to sleep and everything. These underlying issues impact upon their ability to cope and to function in mainstream schools and they display their feelings and emotions through their behaviours. A lot of mainstream schools aren't equipped to be able to deal with these problematic young people and so they often get excluded and sent to as the kids call them, naughty schools.

Researcher: In your opinion what have you found to work well in supporting young people with their educational goals?

Fliss: I can give you an example as we have one young lad in our care at the moment and he had 29.9% attendance record between 2009-2010 and he came to us in August in 2011 so from September 2011 to January 2012 i think it went up to 94.4% and that was due to incentives. This young person is used to a lavish lifestyle which a lot of young people before they come into care just aren't used to the lifestyle but he was and we used financial rewards with him. I am not saying that is good all of the time and it does not work for everyone but in this case it was if you go to school then you can £10 a week on top of your pocket money each week and that was a good incentive for him to go. However the young lad I am on about has a cannabis problem so we didn't look like we were supporting that Cannabis problem then we had to go right okay you can £25 a week with pocket money and incentives if you hit all your targets but it is broken down then so he was not getting £25 pound in his hands.

Researcher: Is it monitored then on what he spends it on?

Fliss: Yes he will get £8 pounds on a Saturday and £8 Pounds on a Sunday so this way you are minimising it, you are not removing the risk but it is reduced as he wouldn't have enough to go buy it. Part of it has worked as his attendance has shot up.

Researcher: Well that is a positive aspect. Was this his first placement?

Fliss: He came from two foster placements that had broken down over a period, one lasted two months and one lasted 6 months.

Researcher: Do you think that the placements reflected on why hi school attendance was poor?

Fliss: I think it was because there were no boundaries in the placements and he needs structure and boundaries and this has been proven. I am not saying that he is absolutely marvellous but in that aspect then he is doing well.

Researcher: What things do young people speak to you about in relation to their education?

Fliss: On reflecting on the children we have now they don't really speak to you about school. If I look around the service now apart from the two young people who are here because they have learning difficulties so that is a totally different scale, erm they sort of block it out i think. My personal experience is that they don't really talk about school unless you ask them and if you do ask them you get yes and no answers, it's as if they don't have any interest in school.

Researcher: Why do you think that is? Do they have a good relationship with staff?

Fliss: Yeah they do have good relationships with staff erm but again it's that stigma isn't it, it's like they avoid talking about it. The young lad who I mentioned before, it's

really hard to get information from him about school because I ask what have you done today at school and he says oh you know the usual he just doesn't want and he can't handle positive praise either.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Fliss: Because he has never had it, we went through a stage when he was receiving loads of positive praise and this had a negative impact on his behaviour, he just can't cope with positive praise.

Researcher: Are there any other reasons you can think of why they don't speak to you about their education?

Fliss: I think it is because school is so difficult for most of them and they don't like to talk about how they feel, but then it could be that most teenagers in general don't speak about what goes on in school do they?

Researcher: Are the young people positive about their educational learning and future chances?

Fliss: I think it is quite negative in my experience i think it is quite negative. At 16 that's it they think I can get my own flat because when they are in care and reach 16 they then move on to the leaving care team and most of the young people in care, in their head think well we are going to get given a flat and they get funding for stuff for the flat and in their head its wonderful and they don't know the reality of it and I think

that is why a lot of it breaks down. I wouldn't want my child to have their own flat at 16 0r 17 because they are still kids aren't they? I think that is probably why there are a lot of break downs. Once they have left it is a big shock, they have no boundaries no structure, financial problems and how are they supposed to get by when they are still kids. Personally my view would be that they shouldn't move out until they are about 21 years old.

Researcher: Why do you think that the leaving age is so low?

Fliss: I think it is all down to funding and financial reasons unfortunately.

Researcher: What do you think could be put in place to be able to increase the leaving age of a young person leaving care?

Fliss: Its simple Government funding.

Researcher: From your experience what do you do if the young person was refusing to attend school?

Fliss: Try and encourage them, find out if there are any issues as to why they are not going and if they don't want to go then you cant force them obviously we would speak to school and liaise with school and maybe get a meeting, if it was the odd day if it was ongoing and the attendance officer kept on ringing saying that they had poor attendance then obviously a strategy meeting would have to be put in place.

Researcher: so are there consequences put in place if they refuse?

Fliss: A lot of our kids respond to the consequences because that has an impact on their life, so the consequence could be right if you don't go to school then you can't earn any incentive and a lot of our kids in care respond to financial incentives or if you don't go to school then you don't get no phone top up. Or if you don't go to school if they are going on a day trip or activities that weekend then they don't get to participate in this. Normally that will usually get them back into school but then there is always the odd one that it doesn't matter they aren't bothered and still won't. Some of them wait for your reaction as one lad at the moment he can be like i am not bothered am not bothered about consequences it doesn't matter what you do you can take everything off him but he really isn't bothered and he wants a reaction so we don't give him one, whilst he is supposed to be in school and he's not in school and he isn't engaging then don't give him the attention that you would normally and that seems to work, it may come across quite harsh but it works for him. You know he wants to get attention all the time and if he isn't getting it then he is like well why are you not giving me a hard time for not going to school? Then his brain is ticking then? It's like reverse psychology.

Researcher: What do you think residential care workers can do to help young people reach their full potential?

Fliss: Support them and engage with them so that you can build a good relationship up with them and hopefully they will respect your views and know that you are only wanting what is best for them. Workers need to be mindful of the young person's

past experiences and be sensitive towards the young person but also firm so that they do not just let things pass them by. Staff need to listen to what the young person wants to so and help them to get on the right path to be able to achieve this.

Researcher: Who do think is responsible in ensuring that the young person receives a good level of education?

Fliss: It is everyone's responsibility. It is the staff in the home, the school the social workers, the parents.

Researcher: Do you think it is important to have a range of services involved to support the young people?

Fliss: Some of our young people will have CAMHS involvement, they have their own advocates so they will speak to their advocate more than they would us about the reasons why they are not going to school so that helps us in a way and thats not because they haven't got good relationships with us it is because they feel its easier to speak to an advocate as they are representing their views and are impartial. I mean not everyone has an advocate or CAMHS involvement some of them are just on their own with the staff but if they do have other outside agencies involved then yeah that can help because they speak to them about any issues they may have and these agencies work with us to help meet their needs. It's important that these outside agencies attend LAC meetings so that everyone is singing off the same hymn sheet and everyone is aware of what is going on in the young person's life. If

there are breakdowns then a psychologists point of view would be kept in mind, as there have a better understanding about the reasons why and so on.

Researcher: Do you think that looked after children have the same opportunities as non-looked after children?

Fliss: The government are trying to make sure that options are available for looked after children as oppose to 10 years ago but i think its yes and no, sorry I would say no actually because a lot of, what if one of our young people was going to go to university, who would fund this? You know a lot of parents pick up the tab. This can't happen for our young people.

Researcher: Is there any funding available for looked after young people to be able to attend University that you are aware of?

Fliss: If they were 18 going to University no I don't believe that there is any funding that I'm aware of. Before they are 18 I believe that Children's Services may be able to pick up the tab.

Researcher Do the leaving care team offer them advice and support? You know the Pathway Teams?

Fliss: Probably seems as though they move to them when they leave here, but then I don't know because it is all down to funding and I don't believe that they would be

funded after 18 I could be wrong I don't know, I have never known any looked after child to go onto University.

Researcher Okay thank you. It is such a shame.

Researcher Do you feel that there is a clear and consistent focus on education within the home?

Fliss: Education is promoted, obviously looked after children are given lap tops from the schools to help them with their education and staff promote it and staff will use incentive charts and sit there with them and encourage them to do their homework and they won't do things with them until their homework is done. Again you can do that with the odd few but the majority of our 15 and 16 year olds then if they don't want to do it you can't make them, many say I haven't got any homework so we phone the school and they say yes they have then we say where's your homework is? They say well I haven't got it and that's more challenging and it's harder to break down the barrier.

Researcher Do you think that staff is interested in what the young people are doing? Do the young people feel that staff are interested in what they are doing and do genuinely care about what they are doing?

Fliss: Oh yes staff do really care about the young people and encourage them all of the time even with activities and stuff they don't want to engage because its staff they don't want to be out doing things with adults especially your staff you know they

want to be with their friends. Staff members do their best to encourage them to make sure that they have the same opportunities as other young people. You know looked after kids can get in the cinema for nothing but we wouldn't dream of going along with our badges and going as that is putting a statement on them isn't it?

Researcher Yeah I understand. Do you think that schools play an active part in ensuring that the young person's needs are being met?

Fliss: Not all schools do no, some of the schools you don't even get a phone call to say that they have not turned up. One of the schools wanted us to put a consequence in place for something that a child had done in school and surely that should be up to the school. I feel that in the EDD schools in my experience are under staffed and the staff aren't always as, because they are under staffed and the work load is high I don't think they are as competent as they should be.

Researcher So does anyone challenge the school when they don't get in contact to inform staff if a young person has not turned in?

Fliss: I challenge them and say you know where the communication is? It's if they just pass the book.

Researcher: Would say that there is a good relationship between the home and the school?

Fliss: Some schools are great and we do have a positive relationship for example we got a questionnaire back the other day and the key worker keeps in daily contact with the staff but that does not apply to some other schools. They have a busy workload and they can't always respond to everything.

Researcher: Do you think it is because if a young person is a regular non-attendee at school and they think that they are truanting again? Is it different is it someone who usually attends but they have been off for a couple of days and they usually have good attendance?

Fliss: Yes definitely

Researcher: What can you tell me about the resources available within the home that help the young person's learning?

Participant- The lap tops a lot of them are registered with local libraries a lot of things are done on the lap top whereas years ago it used to be books and encyclopaedias and we don't have any of them in the homes as everything is accessible on the internet now.

Researcher: Do young people use the internet a lot?

Fliss: Yes they can do but the internet is also supervised as these young people are vulnerable to abuse or harm so it needs to be closely monitored by staff.

Researcher: What facilities are there for young people with complex needs who require additional support?

Fliss: For the young people in special schools they tend not to have homework everything is done by the school really. Transport is provided to and from school they often come back with a chat book so the teacher will write what has happened that day then staff will monitor their mood and their behaviour when they come home for the rest of the evening so if they have had a restless night or they have been up and staff will put that in the chat book and that will go back with them in the morning so if they become disruptive that day and they could be tired then they will have a look in the chat book and they will understand why then. It's a good way to communicate amongst ourselves with school.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that hinders young people from fulfilling their aspirations?

Fliss: I think it is the families, family functioning and history. Also when they have contact with families whilst they are in care its not always a positive relationship and this can be very negative. The young person we have at the moment who is due to leave soon, his mum has such a negative impact on his behaviour. This causes him not to go to school, if something happens then he says he is not going and he is upset.

Researcher: Has it been considered it would be in his best interests to reduce contact with mum?

Fliss: He is 16 so what can you do? It used to be supervised contact but then again he would say I am going down town to shop, but unless you follow him which we have no right to he could be going to sneak off to meet his mum. If they want to meet their family they will find a way to do this. Family and peer pressure are the main reasons i think why they don't fulfil their aspirations.

Researcher: From your experience can you identify one main factor that helps young people achieving their aspirations?

Fliss: I think just supporting them and encouraging them, Giving them all the options available and hopefully they will be interested in something and you can build on that then.

Researcher: What do you suggest can be implemented in the home to support young people with their education?

Fliss: It has to be a bit of ownership on the young person as well you know they have got to want to do it they have got to want to go and if they don't want to then there is little you can do.

Researcher: Is there anything you would like to add?

Fliss: No that's everything.

Researcher: Okay then that's all the questions I have thank you very much.

Appendix 2

University of Chester
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Research Ethics Committee

Applying to the Faculty of Health and Social Care

Research Ethics Committee

Application form

Please use the guidance notes to assist you in completing this application for ethical approval. The boxes will automatically enlarge to allow you to complete each section as fully as possible.

1. Name of lead researcher and applicant [please attach CV] **Lyndsey Burdett**
2. Contact Details **Address** **Daytime phone** **Mobile** **e-mail address**
3. Full and short title **Full title: A qualitative study investigating staff perceptions of the educational achievement of children in care.** **Short title: What factors influence educational achievement of children in residential care?**

4. Additional researchers

There are no additional researchers.

5. Supervisory/mentoring arrangements

Elizabeth Harlow (Personal tutor)

Tim Mann (Head of Health and Social Care)

6. Have you obtained/will you require ethical approval from another source?

The researcher has not applied to any other Research Ethics Committee in the University. The researcher has been granted approval from the private residential children's home to undertake this piece of research.

7. Research outline , including:

- **Brief outline of study, aims and objectives**

The disparity between the achievements of looked after children and their peers remains unacceptably wide. There is evidence in some children's homes that insufficient priority is given to education, for example some young people are not attending school regularly. (Ofsted 2008/2009). For these reasons and more it is significant that more focus should be on those who provide the day to day care for looked after children, this is why it is vital to gain an insight into the perspectives of residential care workers to establish what factors influence the educational outcomes of children in care.

The researcher aims to:

- To provide an in-depth perspective of residential care workers, examining the educational background of children in care.
- To explore what they believe to be the main reasons why some young people in their care fail to achieve in their educational outcomes and to establish key areas of success and why some young people in care **do** achieve positive outcomes.
- To establish what needs to be put in place to help the young people and to highlight good practice in care homes and what works well.
- To contribute to the understanding of how being in care influences young people future life chances.
- To critically analyse educational outcomes of the young people in the unit.

The researcher plans to undertake a small scale qualitative study. The researcher believes a qualitative approach is the appropriate and relevant way to enable her to gather the personal views and perceptions from the residential care workers as to why some of the young people in their care fail to achieve in their educational goals. The paradigm the researcher is using is an interpretive approach as its epistemological assumptions of knowledge arises from

interpretation and insight and it is grounded in empathetic communication with the subjects of the research. (D'Cruz, 2004) This approach is appropriate as the researcher wants to get as much information as possible from the residential care workers. As, Sarantakos, (1998) argues, 'Each method is used where and when it proves the most suited and the best way to obtain the information required.' Qualitative research is also described as more in depth and therefore better when analysing emotions and experiences. Qualitative methods are also far more flexible and allow the researcher to change and develop the methods employed. (Smith, 2009).

Sample size:

The researcher plans to begin by interviewing 5-8 residential care workers who are employed by a private children's residential care home. Interviews will last for about an hour and a further follow up interview will be conducted if needed, should this be appropriate to do so and if the respondent is in full agreement. Two major reasons for using interviews are that they enable the researcher to gain subjective meanings rather than obtaining responses within a standard format. (Banister, 1994).The researcher is aware that the sample size used also depends upon the paradigm used and the chosen approach to the analysis. As the researcher wants to gain as much information about the experiences from the residential care workers as possible then an in depth analysis is required so therefore a smaller sample size of participants is needed.

Pilot:

The researcher also plans to undertake a pilot of one interview to test out the questions and analysis. Robson 2002, states that, "Before the main data collection, you can and should gain experience through pilot work." Robson 2002 also claims that, "Flexible designs are interactive, enabling the sensitive enquirer to capitalise an expected eventualities. It is flexible in the sense that the design changes and develops as a result of the researchers data gathering experiences."

Residential care worker's provide the day to day care and support that looked after children require so that they can attend school and reach their full potential. It is important that the researcher gains an insight into the perspectives given by the residential care workers as essentially they have a care giver role and have a duty under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 to promote educational achievement and ensure that the young people in their care reach the governments '5 outcomes' under the Every Child Matters Agenda 2003. (Brammer, 2007).

The researcher will identify, analyse and evaluate the data gathered from the individual interviews and identify any reoccurring themes in the data. The researcher plans to draw on existing literature, previous research, policy documents and theoretical work that have already been undertaken on the subject. The research project also aims to identify the key factors that help improve the education of the young people in residential care. It is important to promote and share good practice so that young people in residential care have equal opportunities. It is essential to identify and overcome any barriers that are preventing young people in care from achieving well academically and so that systems can be put in place to overcome pitfalls. It is important to listen to residential care workers perspectives and experiences so that young people's individual needs are met and that they have the

assistance required so that deeper understanding of their educational needs can be developed. (Hugh 2009). There is an abundance of research into the views and experiences of children in care. (Martin 2002 & Harker 2004). However, evidence about residential care workers experiences is more limited and there is a little identifiable research in this area at a local level and the researcher has identified none on the Wirral. Therefore, it is vital that residential care workers views and contributions are also viewed in the context of what is known more widely about good practice in supportive placements. (C4EO 2009).

The researcher aims to draw on existing literature, looking at current and previous research, policy documents and theoretical work that have already been undertaken on the subject. The researcher plans to identify, critically analyse and evaluate the literature as to what factors hinder the educational attainment of children in residential care. The researcher will identify strengths and limitations in the literature and the theoretical perspectives given.

- **Study timings**

There is a limited time scale for the researcher to carry out the interviews, gather all the information and transcribe the data. The researcher is aware that she has to allow plenty of time to research the past and current literature on the subject before and during the course of the study. This is an ongoing and time consuming task. Below is an estimated timescale for the study:

May and June 2011: Preparation and ethics application and a review of the literature.

July and August 2011: Data collection.

September 2011: Data analysis.

October 2011: Writing report.

November 2011: Dissemination.

- **Data Collection, analysis and rationale**

Interviews will be individual and held in the participant's work place, in private room and semi-structured with open ended questions, as these provide no restrictions on the content or manner of the reply other than on the subject area. Data will be collected using audio recording equipment during the interview. The researcher will obtain hand written signed consent from participants stating that they agree to be audio recorded before the interviews take place. The researcher will interpret participant's perceptions by transcribing the interview data and organising the data into themes. A thematic analysis of the data will be used to identify and pull out key themes and occurrences in the research findings. The researcher will familiarise herself with the data by listening to the audio tapes, transcribing and re-reading the data that has been collated. Indexing and coding will be used to identify key points. All quotes will be indexed so that they can be traced back to an identifiable subject and setting. (Greenhalgh 1997). This is important in that the researcher is able to quickly reference or provide evidence in the data. Identified codes will be collated into themes and reviewed, defined and named. The researcher will then complete the data analysis and write up the results.

The researcher's principle focus will be to ensure that the research data is transferable and

that the research is 'trustworthy'. The researcher will use the same interview questions in all the interviews and audio record the interviews to ensure that it is trustworthy. D'Cruz (2001) says, "In using the same research instruments and techniques the researcher is likely to get the same results, which is a way of confirming the trustworthiness of the research and its outcomes. Marlow (2001) states, "Researchers using these assumptions about the trustworthiness of their research process and methods seek to maximise reliability by minimising sources of error." The researcher will also take into account the context and circumstances in which the data has been gathered. (Robson 2002). The researcher will consult with the participant to ensure that the researcher has assigned the same meaning and the interpretation of the data collated is correct. The researcher will consult with their supervisor throughout the research study to ensure that they are undertaking appropriate measures and adhering to good practice.

The researcher is responsible for all expenses that are required to carry out the research and will reimburse participants for any costs.

- **Type of participant**

The participants taking part in this research study will be employed by the private children's service as residential care workers.

- **Attach consent forms, questionnaires etc**

Consent forms have been attached.

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8. **Summary of ethical issues – please address all the headings, even if it is to reassure the committee that it is not applicable. The guidance notes contain further information to help you complete this section**

- **Avoidance of harm and distress**

This research will involve participants sharing their personal experiences about themselves and some of the young people that they work with. As this may involve the sharing of sensitive information the researcher has applied to the University of Chester Ethics Committee for permission to proceed with the research study. Permission from the children's home is also essential before any of the research is undertaken. The participants will be fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research via the participant information sheet. The researcher will provide contact details so that the participants can contact her if they wish to do so to ask any questions they may have about the study. Consent will be voluntary and participants working rights and duties not will be affected if they take part or choose not to take part in the study.

It is particularly important when we conduct research that we recognise that we may need to compromise some of the specific requirements of scientific methods. Not only do we have to ensure that our actual research process does not cause harm to the groups we are researching, but also that the research is not used to further marginalise people. (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected at all times. (Economic

and Social Research Council, 1965)

It is of paramount importance that the researcher gains the trust of the participants and respects their basic rights. The participants will be informed that they have 'access rights to see his/her personal data at any time' and can withdraw from the project at any time if they wish to do so. (Section 7: the Data Protection Act 1998). If at any time during the interview the participant becomes upset then the interview will be terminated or a break session will be offered. The participant can resume if and when they wish to do so. The researcher will act in the best interests of the participant and maintain a professional relationship whilst conducting the research. The participants will be reminded again that they can withdraw from the study at anytime. The Data Protection Act 1989 regulations for gathering and storing information will be the framework used when collecting and storing information. All the information will be locked in a filing cabinet to ensure that the information is safe and protected from anyone reading it other than the researcher.

The researcher also has a professional responsibility to provide further information in regards to accessing support services and to inform the research participations of all outcomes. (Carey, 2009).

- **Potential benefits for participants**

The researcher hopes to identify what the key factors are that hold some young people in care from reaching their full potential. Also to recognise what does work well and highlight good practice so that strategies can be put in place to help improve the education of young people in residential care. Identifying barriers to academic achievement will be a positive step forward and the research will hopefully contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes for young people in residential care. The researcher plans to thank the participants for their time and for taking part in the project by offering a small token in the form of a gift voucher.

- **Health and safety issues for researchers**

The researcher will interview staff in their work place while the young people are at school. The researcher is aware of lone working policy and how to reduce risk due to her roles from previous employment. The researcher will keep her mobile phone with her in case she needs to phone for assistance. The researcher is aware of the information sharing process and is able to manage difficult situations. The researcher will carry out the interview of staff in accordance to the children's home requirements and use supervision with her tutor to ensure that she is following good health and safety practice so risk is managed and reduced for both her-self and participants.

- **Participant recruitment, criteria, reimbursement and relationship**

Participation will be voluntary and participants will be fully informed about the research project through the information sheet provided. The researcher plans to liaise with the children's home manager as the research project will be brought to the attention of staff during a team meeting. People who are interested in taking part can speak to the researcher in more detail either on the phone or face to face. An information leaflet will also be provided and handed out staff at the meeting to inform participants in more detail about the aims of the research study and how the information will be gathered and disseminated. Contact details will be provided within the leaflet so they can contact the researcher at any time. This will then help reduce possible bias as staff then have the opportunity to take part if they wish

to do so, on their own accord.

- **Informed consent and confidentiality**

The researcher will not conduct any research with participants until informed consent has been signed and agreed by the participant. Participants will have a copy of the participant information sheet and will be reminded throughout the project that it is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time. The researcher will allow for a 24 hour time scale so that participants can reflect on their decision and to ask any questions they may have.

- **Management of data**

All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. (Brammer, 2007). Data and audio recordings will be stored and locked away in a filing cabinet and a safe place. Personal information will be treated as confidential and anonymised. It will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be transferred to any other organisations. Information gathered during the study will be kept confidential and identities will be anonymised in any publications. However, under the Children Act (1989/2004) the researcher has duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and any disclosures that a young person is at risk of or is experiencing 'significant harm' then this information must be passed on. These procedures will be thoroughly explained to participants before the research begins. (Brammer, 2010).

- **Vulnerable groups**

The researcher will not be proactively working with or interviewing vulnerable people. However, the researcher will be aware that some people who are willing to take part may have personal issues or experiences and the researcher will be sensitive and keep this in mind during the research project. The researcher will need to ensure that members of staff are not coerced into taking part and that it is done voluntarily.

9. Form RO1

The researcher has not applied for the R01 form as she does not need to apply for external funding.

10. Signatures

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge, I have accurately provided all the relevant information to the RESC for their consideration of your proposal. I also agree to provide a supplementary application if it becomes necessary to utilise additional data collection methods and to inform the RESC if the nature of my proposed study changes significantly.

Signature   L. Burdett   Date 12.5.11

- If you are a student, please ask your supervisor to sign and date your application to indicate their approval of your proposal.

Supervisor's signature …………………………………………. Date……………………

Appendix 3

Ethical approval granted

Appendix 4

Participant information sheet

What factors influence educational achievement of children in residential care?

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information sheet carefully and feel free to discuss it with your colleagues and manager if you wish to do so. Do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is that you are not sure about or if you would like more information I would oblige to discuss this with you. Please allow yourself time to decide whether or not you would like to participate.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to interview a number of residential care workers to establish what they believe to be the main factors that help or hinder the educational achievement of young people in their care. The interviews will help the researcher gain an insight into how being in care impacts on the education of the young people. This information hopefully, will contribute to current research and raise awareness on the subject. In identifying what works well and highlighting good practice in the home may help young people reach their full potential and achieve positive outcomes.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are working as a Residential Care Worker with experience of supporting looked after children and their educational achievements.

Do I have to take part?

voluntary. However, if you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you do agree to take part and at any point you no longer want to continue with the study then you are able to withdraw any time and you do not have to provide a reason for the withdrawal. Your decision will be respected and it will not affect your current employment status or any of your other rights.

What will happen to me if I take part?

After giving informed consent you will be invited to participate in an interview, which will take about 30-45 minutes. The interview will be conducted in private and audio taped with your permission. Interviews will be confidential and anonymous; you will not be identifiable in the final report.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study. You may experience a range of different emotions during the study when sharing your experiences. If at any time you want a break or stop the interview then this will be respected and accommodated by the researcher.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits to you but the study may identify ways of improving the service to benefit young people in the future. In your role you may welcome the opportunity to share and discuss your views and experiences. You will be offered a Boots gift card as a thank you for taking part in the study.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Tim Mann (Head of Health and Social Care) t.mann@chester.ac.uk

not otherwise), then you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for this.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, only the researcher will have access. Any material that contains identifiable information will be kept securely. Data will be coded and anonymised and stored safely in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher has access.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up into a report. It is hoped that the findings may be used to contribute what is already known about the subject. You can have copy of the findings if you request it.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research will be organised and funded by the research student under the guidance and supervision of the University of Chester.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Lyndsey Burdett

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Appendix 5

Consent form

Title of Project: A qualitative study investigating staff perceptions of the educational achievement of children in care.

Name of Researcher: Lyndsey Burdett

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet, dated........for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree that interviews will be audio recorded.

5. I agree for the material to be used for subsequent research and for the purpose of this dissertation.

6. I understand that the information I give will be anonymised.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature

(if different from researcher)

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix 6

Research Title:

What do residential care workers believe to be the key factors holding back young people in the achievement of their educational goals within the Wirral?: A qualitative study.

Introduction / Context of study:

The research project is a small scale study that investigates the key factors that contribute to poor educational outcomes for young people in residential care on the Wirral. The idea for the proposal stems from the researchers previous experience of working with looked after children as the home school attendance officer for children in care. The researcher's interest in this area has continued to grow due to a new role as a residential care worker in children's homes.

This study is important and necessary as there is a gap in the research investigating the views and perceptions of residential care workers and the reasons they believe so many children in public care have poor educational outcomes. The researcher proposes to get the perspectives of residential care workers in the Wirral and what they believe the main reasons are that hold back young people from achieving in their education. Essentially these care workers have a 'caregiver' role and have a duty under the Children Act 1989 and 2004, (Brammer, 2007) to promote and safeguard these young people ensuring that they reach their full potential. This is significant as residential workers are key people in the lives of young people in care and act as a 'corporate parent'. Therefore it is important to identify these barriers and put systems in place to overcome pitfalls and work towards improving academic

achievement for these young people. It is also paramount to highlight good practice in care homes and to recognise what works well, such as the positive promotion of education and regular school attendance.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 places statutory guidance on how local authorities should implement the duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This can be seen in the context of the 'Every Child Matters' 2003[iv], change for children programme, which aims to improve outcomes for all children and in the Children Act 1989 and 2004. (Brammer, 2007). If there are so many policies and guidance to promote positive outcomes for looked after young people then why are so many failing their education?

Residential Care workers provide the day to day care and support that looked after children require so that they can attend school and reach their full potential. It is vital that this research is done so that residential care workers can have their say and also so that other people involved with the young people can be educated about the reasons why so many children in residential care fail in their education. There is an abundance of research into the views and experiences of children in care, (Harker, 2004 and Martin, 2002), however, evidence about residential carers experience is more limited; there is no identifiable research on the Wirral. Therefore, it is important their contribution is also viewed in the context of what is known more widely about good practice in supportive placements. (C4EO, 2009) It is important to listen to people's perspectives and experiences so that strategies can be put in place to improve ways of working so that young people's individual needs are met and that they are being 'cared' for and not just 'looked after'. (Hugh 2009).

There are currently 383 'looked after' children in the Wirral. (Wirral Virtual School, 2010) The Wirral's Children and Young Person's Plan (2008-2011) aims to reduce the gap in attainment and improve prospects for looked after children. The Joint Guidance Education of young people 'looked after' by the Local Authority (DfEE/DOH 2000) identified the need for better integrated planning of both care and education, this was addressed by introducing Designated Teachers (DT) in every school and an individual Personal Education Plan (PEP) for children in care. However, there is still a long way to go as attendance and attainment remains a problem, as the 2008/09 OC2[v] figures show that 12.53 per cent out of 383 of looked after children missed 25 days or more of education. (Wirral Virtual School, 2010). There is a massive gap between the attainment of children looked after by local authorities and their peers, only 6 per cent achieve 5 or more GCSE[vi] subjects at grades A*-C as opposed to 53 per cent of all children. (DfES, 2010). A shocking 43 per cent of looked after children leave school with no GCSE qualifications in comparison to only 5 per cent of non-looked after children. (DfES, 2010).

This research is needed as education failure is the root of many social problems and children's homes are seen as being responsible for a series of poor outcomes among former residents, including unemployment (Biehal et al., 1995), homelessness, (Yates, 1995) and 'teenage pregnancies' (Garnett, 1992). Children who grow up in local authority care, 'looked after' under the Children Act 1989, are 50 times more likely to wind up in prison and 66 times more likely to have children needing public care. (Jackson, 2005) The educational achievement of young people leaving residential care is crucial because of its impact on their future life opportunities. (Cheung, 1994 and Jackson, 1998). Looked after children, especially

185

those in residential care are arguably the most in need of realistic and well planned education provision. (Hayden, 2005).

The projects findings and recommendations will hopefully contribute to the improvement of educational outcomes for children in residential care and improve life chances. As Shaw (2007) states, good research in social work will aim to promote justice, social change and social inclusion.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the project is to investigate the educational outcomes of young people in residential care in Wirral Local Authority and identify the key factors that hinder academic achievement. The researcher aims to:

- Identify, critically analyse and evaluate the educational outcomes, specifically focusing on GCSE achievements of looked after children.

- The researcher is going to draw on existing literature, looking at previous research, policy documents and theoretical work that have already been undertaken on the subject.

- Identify, critically analyse and evaluate the literature as to what factors hinder educational attainment.

- To establish residential care workers perceptions on what they believe helps or hinders the education of children in their care.

- Evaluate the research and identify effective strategies and recommendations to help improve educational outcomes and prospects for young people in residential care.

Literature Review

Objective: This review has used a systematic approach and the researcher has summarised both academic and policy literature around children in residential care and their educational outcomes, specifically focusing around the key factors that contribute to poor academic achievement. Published, unpublished and grey literature on the topic was uncovered during the search. The literature was then reviewed, evaluated and critically appraised by the researcher. Due consideration was given the strengths as well as the limitations of the research literature, the theoretical perspectives given and any ethical issues that there may have been.

Materials and methods: The published literature that the researcher found was located through the soc index, ebsco host and electronic databases. The search found a huge number of full text journals and other peer reviewed articles. Search engines such as google and google scholar enabled the researcher to locate relevant documents from government and professional organisations websites, such as, Department for Education and Skills and National Statistic's online. The internet also enabled the researcher to access information subject gateways such as Intute and SCIE. The search of all the literature on the topic enabled the researcher to identify all the different types of literature and systematically select appropriate articles. Common and recurrent themes were chosen for further scrutiny and listed. The researcher used the critical appraisal skills programme tool (Oxman, 2002) to make sense of the literature and to explore the validity and results of the articles. In selecting the papers the researcher acknowledged their own personal bias, values and assumptions relevant to the subject.

Results: The researcher encountered difficulties narrowing down the material when using the search engine as the results were huge a total of 62,044. To overcome this large amount of data the researcher refined their search by putting limitations on the date published (1987-2011) and changing the research area to 'England' only. By filtering and sorting the data the research results were narrowed down to 682. The researcher then scanned through the available data saving to 'folder' the relevant ones. After a systematically narrowing down the literature there were around 30 articles that were significant. These sources were examined and just over two thirds were selected for more in-depth examination. The majority of the studies were qualitative in design and included children's participation during or throughout the process. (Holland, 2009, Gallagher, 2004, Harker, 2004 and Martin, 2002,). A critical appraisal of the relevant literature confirmed to the researcher that this research is needed and relevant as there is very little research on the Wirral and none on the perceptions and views of residential care workers in relation to educational outcomes of children in residential care.

Conclusion: There is a lot of research on the factors that contribute to poor educational outcomes of looked after children and the perceptions of young people in care. However, there is very little literature on people who work with them. This review found that there is very little research on the Wirral around educational achievements of children in residential care and what factors contribute to poor outcomes. There is no identifiable literature on the perspectives of residential care worker's on the Wirral, therefore, this research hopes to contribute to the on this subject literature for the local authority.

Key words / terms used: 'looked after', 'children', 'care', 'public care', 'care leavers', 'residential', 'education', outcomes', 'attainment', 'residential workers' and 'Wirral'. Boolean phrases such as 'and', 'or' and 'not' were used between key words. By combining key words it was possible to limit the search.

Overview of existing literature:

Poor educational outcomes of looked after children has been noted for decades (Ferguson1966, Jackson 1987). Jackson's study in 1987 put the education of children in care into the public sphere and forced the government to recognise the failings of social and educational services to meet the needs of these children and acknowledge that something needed to be done. Research has consistently shown that children in public care fall behind at school and seldom achieve good qualifications (Martin and Jackson, 2002). In 2003 Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation *'Into the mainstream' (2003)* has shown that young people leaving care are less likely to be involved in education, training or employment and more vulnerable to poor life chances and social exclusion later in life. However, In contrast, Harker's research interview data gathered from a sample of looked after children in the *'Who takes care of education 18 months on'* (*2004),* showed that most of the sample believed that their education had improved as a consequence of being looked after.

The key factors that hinder educational attainment were identified in the Government's Social Exclusion Unit Report (2003). 'A Better Education for Children in Care'. The main five key causes of under achievement of 'looked after' children are that:

- Their lives are characterised by instability.

- They spend too much time out of school.

- They do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind.

- Primary carers are not expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development.

- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education.

However, the problems of poor achievement for this group of young people were still a major issue and were being addressed years later. In 2006 the 'Taking Care of Education Project' and the Government green paper, 'Care Matters': Transforming the lives of Children and Young People in Care, acknowledged that: 'the life chances of all children have improved but those of children in care have not improved at the same rate. The result is that children in care are now at a greater risk of being left behind than was the case a few years ago, therefore the gap had actually grown.'

Current research and trends:

 Firstly, this literature review will summarise a report on the 'educational outcomes of looked after children', by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Service (C4EO). For the first time, high quality research and data about 'what works' is being gathered in one place, creating a single comprehensive centre of evidence. The purpose of the study was to gather and share evidence about what makes the most significant difference to outcomes for vulnerable young people and to support the sector to narrow the gap in society. The research paradigm is quantitative and the literature review aimed to identify empirically based research. The search strategy involved systematic scanning and evaluation of academic databases, websites and internet subject gateways. An analysis of key

data from the UK from 2002 onwards to 2010 was undertaken. The data was appropriately collected and the results were clearly presented to the reader. A number of recommendations were suggested and there were a number of useful references for further support and information on the research in question for young people, workers and carer's.

This published research is critical as it provides a more comprehensive picture of the poor achievement of children in residential care in the form of statistics. These show that in 2009 only 13.5 % of looked after children in England achieved 5 A*-C grades in both English and Maths in comparison to 48.5 % of non-looked after children. (C4EO, 2009). However, a critique of this data is that it does not capture the more complex processes involved in working with looked after children and the many different ways in which policy and practice is impacting on their educational experience and outcomes. (Beveridge, 2007). The strengths of the C4OE review include: identification of the best available evidence from research and national data and it has a full comprehensive and documented search for relevant information. An analysis of the quality and strength of evidence was also undertaken and results were clearly displayed. The limitations of the review is that it did not extend the search criteria and does not incorporate literature relating to the care of looked after young people generally, which may be extremely important in understanding the educational experience of the looked-after group. Another limitation of the review was that it was limited to English-speaking countries only.

Next the literature review is going to critically appraise, The British Journal of Social Work (2004), 'Good Practice in Education of Children in Residential Care', by Bernard Gallagher. It is a small scale study undertaken in two children's homes, the

review was clear and focused in terms of the research subject in question and the researcher considered a wide range of previous research on the topic and government policy. The aim of the study was to evaluate and assess the quality of care in the home, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to make recommendations on how to improve educational prospects for the young people.

The study drew upon a wide range of information sources as possible to enable an effective evaluation of different aspects of the young people's lives. Utilising as many different sources as possible for evaluation helps to enhance the projects strength and value. (Smith, 2009). Wide mixtures of views were sought from both residential workers and young people. Interviews were held in private using semi-structured methods to enable key areas to be covered and to gain as much information as possible. External agency workers were also active participant's this helped improve the validity and reliability of the research as they were not employees of the home, so less likely to be biased. Consideration to some ethical issues was given as the researcher obtained consent first before interviewing the young people. However, the residential care workers were expected to take part in the research. This is not ethically right and puts pressure on workers to participate, therefore, this could be damaging to the research as answers given may not be true accounts due to the forceful nature of participation. The research failed to get GCSE or predicted grades of the young people and there was a lack of academic or educational evidence to support the research's findings. However, a positive aspect of the research was that it looked at all aspects of the young person's lives and the progress they had made in other areas, such as, engagement and attendance. There was no critique of the children's home, everything seemed to be positive, this lead the reader to be aware of possible bias. All the results from the evaluation suggest that children in

residential care can have good educational outcomes. The limitations of the research are the small sample size and the methodological limitations on the amount of information concerning the young people's attainment. There are a number of benefits in this article as it shares good practice in children's homes and points out that multi-agency working is essential to help raise educational outcomes. This research also shows other looked after children that you can do well in care, not just academically but all other aspects of their lives. The report has a positive outlook and could help to boast morale amongst care staff. The research also informs policy maker's that there is still a long way to go to improve the lives of children in residential care.

Research Design/ Methods

The research phenomenon is a study on the educational outcomes of looked after children in residential care on the Wirral. The research will be conducted in Wirral Borough Council local authority. The researcher will interview residential care workers to gain an insight into what factors they believe hinder academic achievement for children in residential care. This is a qualitative study, with a flexible design and largely consisting of explanatory research, the researcher has chosen this approach as the purpose is to investigate the why of social phenomena. What are the causes and factors associated with poor educational outcomes? Payne (2005) states that symbolic interaction may help practitioners and service users understand the world around them. Smith (2009) agrees that it is concerned with investigating the processes by which shared meanings are achieved, as without establishing a common basis for interaction would become highly problematic. It is important to investigate the research this way as, Bulmer, (1986) states, 'human beings in interacting with one another have to take account of what each other is

doing, they are forced to handle situations in terms of what they take into account.' The way workers interpret difficulties the young people are experiencing and their personal perceptions and experiences of external factors such as class and background will influence their values and assumptions. However, critics of symbolic interaction state that it is unable to deal with social structure and macro-sociological issues. Other critics say it is too broad, vague and difficult to use, therefore, the theory is difficult to test. (West, 2010).

A paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for those who share them. There are three main paradigms used in social research, positivist, interpretive and feminist. The paradigm the researcher is using is an interpretive approach as its epistemological assumptions of knowledge arises from interpretation and insight and it is grounded in empathetic communication with the subjects of the research. (D'Cruz, 2004) This approach is appropriate as the researcher wants to get as much information as possible from the residential care workers. As, Sarantakos, (1998) argues, 'Each method is used where and when it proves the most suited and the best way to obtain the information required.' Hermeneutics is relevant to this research as this is just one example of the process whereby people make sense of their world. The research task is to interpret text, (perceptions), of key workers, therefore, several hermeneutic strategies must be considered. For instance, the closer one is to the source of the text the more valid one's interpretation is likely to be. This is a sharp contrast to the positivist stance of 'distance' from the object being studied. Carer's of looked after children can interpret their language much more readily than outsiders. (Robson, 2002).

Interpretive approaches tend to criticise traditional quantitative positivistic research as there is a rejection of the view that the 'truths' about the social world can be established by using natural science methods. Interpretive approaches believe that people, unlike the objects of the natural world, are conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them. (Robson, 2002). Blaikie (1993), states, 'that facts and figures cannot be separated' and Sarantakos, (1998), argues, 'that social phenomena exists not 'out there' but in the minds of interpretations and reality cannot be defined objectively but only subjectively. Reality is interpreted in social action'. The researcher is using a qualitative methodology approach as this enables a further knowledge of the situation when seeking to describe social reality. This is appropriate as the research centralises the concerns of a marginalised and disempowered group. (Alston, 2003). Qualitative methods are far more flexible and allow the researcher to change and develop the methods employed. (Smith, 2009).

As the research is a small scale project, interviewing five residential care workers it is open to criticism. There are a number of problems with interpretive approaches, Bryman (2001) notes, there is no real consensus among qualitative researchers on appropriate methods for data collection and analysis and unjustified assumptions from the accounts of a small number of individuals. From a positivist epistemological assumption, knowledge arises from experiments and observations. It is grounded in experience that we know things through our senses and no other way with the aim of arriving at universal claims to truth. Quantitative methodologies are highly valued in positivist research. (D' Cruz, 2004).

The researcher decided against interviewing the young people themselves because of the numerous ethical issues this would involve and opted to interview key workers instead. Interviews will be individual and held in the participant's work place, in private and semi-structured with open ended questions, as these provide no restrictions on the content or manner of the reply other than on the subject area. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews are that they are flexible, allow more depth and encourage co-operation and rapport. (Robson, 2002). The researcher proposes to interview five residential care workers as this is a small scale project and consideration to the length of time it will take to interview, analyse and evaluate the data must be addressed.

The topic area will be specified and questions varied depending on the issues being explored. This allows the researcher to move into new areas of inquiry and to better understand the perspectives and priorities of the subject. (Robson, 2002). However, the major factor against interviewing is the lack of anonymity and this could restrict the answers people are willing to give. (Smith, 2009). The researcher will reassure participants that individual results will be confidential and not discussed. Interviews can take a long time to do and to analyse the information. There may also be leading questions and interviewer control may be difficult. Other influences such as, environmental factors can vary which could affect respondent answers. (Smith, 2009). The researcher ruled out observations as they can be time consuming and the researcher being present can influence results. (Mayo, 1945)

The strength of the qualitative research lies in validity (closeness to the truth), using a selection of data collection methods that touch the core of what is going on rather than just skimming the surface. The validity of qualitative methods is greatly

improved by getting an independent analysis of the data by more than one researcher. Therefore, a second opinion of the data interpretation will be obtained from another person who is not directly involved in the research project. To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. (Seale (1999). When judging (testing) qualitative work, redefinition is required in order to fit the realities of qualitative research. (Strauss, 1990). In contrast, Stenbacka (2001) argues that since reliability issue concerns measurement then it has no relevance in qualitative research.

It is important that the researcher has a critical perspective during the research and upholds the professional values which promote anti-oppressive practice and a non-judgemental approach considering contextual factors, such as unequal power relations'. (Smith, 2009). Some researchers believe that it is important to 'bracket off' their own beliefs and assumptions in order to avoid distorting either the process or their findings. (Gearing, 2004). In contrast the research cannot be totally 'value free' as what helps the reader is the opportunity to locate the situated knowledge claims it makes in relation to the perspective and acknowledged preconceptions of the researcher. (Smith, 2009). The researcher understands that human nature makes pure objectivity impossible (Carey, 2009). The researcher will attend supervision sessions with the University during the research project to allow reflectivity and aim to prevent research bias. Critics have accused qualitative researchers of continually moving their own goal posts. Therefore, the researcher will allow periods away from their field work for reflection, planning and consultation with colleagues. (Greenhalgh, 1997).

Data Analysis:

There are various methods and approaches to collecting and analysing data as Bryman (2004), stresses, 'there are few well-established and widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data.' Braun & Clarke (2006) believe thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. Any trends and occurrences in research findings will be identified and key themes 'pulled out'. (Carey 2009). The researcher plans to familiarise herself with the data, transcribing, re-reading and writing notes. The researcher will use a coding/index approach to identify key points in the information that has been given. All quotes will be indexed so that can be traced back to an identifiable subject and setting. (Greenhalgh, 1997). This is important in that the researcher is able to quickly reference or provide evidence in the data. Identified codes will be collated into themes and reviewed, defined and named. The researcher will then complete the data analysis. 'The write up of a thematic analysis, is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis.' (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interpretation and analysis of the data will run throughout the research project, as the researcher is interested in a process of discovery, whereby essential themes and categories are allowed to emerge from the data. (Smith, 2009). As Mason (1996) agrees, 'some researchers will wish to generate indexing categories in a fairly grounded way while others may be less concerned with this, because their categories are already pre-determined'.

The researcher is going to use framework analysis as the question is specific and pre-designed in that the sample of participants will have been chosen and not random. The primary concern appears to be with description and interpretation of what is happening in a specific setting. As the researcher moves through the stages of the framework analysis, themes will be charted and original transcripts will be referred back too. In practice, research studies are often bound by constraints of time and resources, and analysis has to be brought to a close when specific questions have been answered. Framework analysis is an approach more suited to research asking specific questions and with limited timescales than grounded theory. (Lacey, 2001).The researcher will be using the Miles and Huberman (1994) approach to analysis which concentrates on reducing the bulk of qualitative data to manageable amounts.

Analysing interview data of accounts are strong on content and its interpretation, but much weaker on providing sufficient information to judge the reliability and validity of the accounts given by the interviewees. To improve the research validity and reliability, the researcher will have to take account the context and circumstances in which the data has been gathered. (Robson, 2002). The researcher will also use a 'quality control' approach, in that the data has been analysed by more than one researcher to confirm that they are assigning the same meaning to them, although in practice this is often difficult to achieve. (Greenhalgh, 1997). This can be done by asking a second opinion or view of the data by consulting with the researcher's supervisor.

Sampling

Due to it being a small scale project the researcher plans to interview five participants using a qualitative research approach as this allows for small sample groups, this would also be of benefit so that more time can be spent in discussion and interviews as opposed to the more statistical and wider scale quantitative research approach. (Carey, 2009).

Ethical considerations

The researcher plans to apply to the University of Chester Ethics committee and the Wirral Borough Council Ethics Board for permission to proceed with the research proposal. Research participants must be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research. The project will be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality. The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected. (Economic and Social Research Council, 1965)

It is particularly important when we conduct research with marginalised social groups that we recognise that we may need to compromise some of the specific requirements of scientific methods. Not only do we have to ensure that our actual research process does not cause harm to the groups we are researching, but also that the research is not used to further marginalise these already vulnerable people. (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005)

The researcher plans to provide information sheets explaining what the project is about to all participants and to improve the ethics around the study the researcher will ensure they know they have the right to decline. Signed consent from the

residential care staff participating in the study will be obtained before the study begins. It is of paramount importance that the researcher gains the trust of the participants and respects their rights. The participants will be informed that they have 'access rights to see his/her personal data at any time' and can withdraw from the project at any time if they wish to do so. (Section 7: the Data Protection Act 1998). The researcher has a professional responsibility to provide further information in regards to accessing support services and to inform the research participations of all outcomes. (Carey, 2009).

All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. (Brammer, 2007). Data and audio recordings will be stored and locked away in a safe place. Personal information will be treated as confidential and anonymous. It will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be transferred to any other organisations. However, under the Children Act (1989/2004) the researcher has duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and any disclosures that a young person is at risk of or is experiencing 'significant harm' then this information must be passed on. These procedures will be thoroughly explained before the research begins. (Brammer, 2007)

<u>Limitations and dilemmas:</u>

After establishing the views of the residential care workers and evaluating the research the researcher hopes to identify effective strategies and make recommendations to help improve educational outcomes and prospects for young people in residential care. However, the researcher is aware of the 'do-ability' of the study and amount of time they have is limited.

Resources and financial costs

All costs, such as the audio recording equipment, printing and travel will be paid for by the researcher. Costing will be minimal as it will rely largely on face to face interviews.

Time Scale

Once ethical approval is received from the University of Chester Ethics Committee and the Wirral Borough Council Ethics Board the researcher plans to meet with the manager of Children's Services to arrange interviews with members of residential care staff.

It is difficult to apply a timescale to this type of research as there may be issues that arise over the period of time due to the processes involved in readjusting and any unforeseen events or disclosures that may arise. Consideration will also have to be given to the time involved in conducting separate interviews and transcribing the data.

A Gantt chart will be used as a visual indictor of the stages of the research as this is ideal as the research is a small scale project. The bar chart will illustrate the projects schedule and breakdown the structure of the research. (Wikipedia, 2011).

Below is an estimated timescale:

Preparation and ethics: May-June 2011

Data Collection: July and August 2011

Data Analysis: September 2011

Writing report: October 2011

Dissemination: November 2011

Indicative outputs / Dissemination

The researcher aims to identify and examine what the main barriers are holding back young people in residential care from achieving in their education. The results will be analysed and compiled into a report. Key findings and copies of the report will be available on request. The results of the study will be disseminated to the manager and care staff of the residential placements in Wirral. The results may highlight issues that need to be addressed and measures that can be put in place to overcome these challenges and barriers. Hopefully the young persons' needs are addressed appropriately and with the right support from their workers they can achieve in their education and a better life for themselves and future generations.

Word count: 5, 498

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Appendix

Literature Review:

The published literature that the researcher found was located through the soc index, ebsco host and electronic databases. The search found a huge number of full text journals and other peer reviewed articles. Search engines such as google and google scholar enabled the researcher to locate relevant documents from government and professional organisations websites, such as, Department for Education and Skills and National Statistic's online. The internet also enabled the researcher to access information subject gateways such as Intute and SCIE. The search of all the literature on the topic enabled the researcher to identify all the different types of literature and systematically select appropriate articles. Common and recurrent themes were chosen for further scrutiny and listed. The researcher used the critical appraisal skills programme tool (Oxman, 2002) to make sense of the literature and to explore the results and the trustworthiness of the articles. In selecting the papers the researcher acknowledged their own personal bias, values and assumptions relevant to the subject.

The researcher encountered difficulties narrowing down the material when using the search engine as the results were huge a total of 62,044. To overcome this large amount of data the researcher refined their search by putting limitations on the date published (1987-2012) and changing the research area to 'England' only. By filtering and sorting the data the research results were narrowed down to 682. The researcher then scanned through the available data saving to 'folder' the relevant ones. After a systematically narrowing down the literature there were around 30 articles that were significant. These sources were examined and just over two thirds

were selected for more in-depth examination. The majority of the studies were qualitative in design and included children's participation during or throughout the process. (Holland, 2009, Gallagher, 2004, Harker, 2004 and Martin, 2002,).

Key words / terms used: 'looked after', 'children', 'care', 'public care', 'care leavers', 'residential', 'education', outcomes', 'attainment', 'residential workers' and 'Wirral'. Boolean phrases such as 'and', 'or' and 'not' were used between key words. By combining key words it was possible to limit the search.

Endnotes

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[i] Every Child Matters 2003: Five outcomes: enjoy and achieve, stay safe, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well being and be healthy.
[ii] OC2 cohort, DCSF 2000/9. The number of looked after children who have missed 25 days or more of schooling.
[iii] GCSE is General Certificate of Secondary School Education, awarded in a specified subject.

[iv]Every Child Matters 2003: Five outcomes: enjoy and achieve, stay safe, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well being and be healthy.

[v] OC2 cohort, DCSF 2000/9. The number of looked after children who have missed 25 days or more of schooling.

[vi] GCSE is General Certificate of Secondary School Education, awarded in a specified subject.