'Beyond the homogenous group'

Using management information system data to understand pathways through and out of care & outcomes

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England: Out of home care population

Based on the latest data from the Department for Education statistical returns (supplied by all 150 local authorities)(Reporting year 2022)

- 82,170 Children Looked After (CLA) (70 CLA per 10,000 children)
- Continuing rise in recent years (but wide variation between local authorities. Range 26 CLA per 10,000 to 218 per 10,000)
- CLA predominantly older with 10-15 year olds accounting for 39% and 25% 16+
- Children of black, mixed and other ethnic groups overrepresented
- 70% looked after on a care order, 17% voluntary arrangement (remainder placement orders)

Main reasons for entry to out of home care

- Abuse and neglect most common: 66%

- Parenting capacity chronically inadequate ('family dysfunction'): 13%

- Temporary crisis that diminishes parenting capacity ('family in acute stress'): 7%

- No parents available to provide care (inc. UASC): 7%

- Child's or parents disability: 5%

- Low income or socially unacceptable behavior: 1%

Placements

- Foster placements most common 70% (*but lower amongst older CLA – 44% of 16/17 year olds in foster placements)

- Increase in foster placements with relative or friend (15% of all CLA)

- Unregulated placements (semi-independent or independent living) increased by 23% since last year (9% of CLA; 7470)

- 11,100 left care on their 18th birthday

- 62% eligible* for staying put remained with former foster carers (at 18)

- 31% eligible for staying put remained at age 19-20

Legal and policy frameworks in England

- Targeted legislation applies across the country and extension of duties

- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; Children and Young Persons Act 2008;Children and Families Act 2014, Children and Social Work Act 2017

- Personal Adviser (PA) to help young people plan for their futures –up to the age of 25

- Local authorities required to provide support for 'Staying Put' (extended care placements with former foster carers until 21) since 2014. Proposal to increase upper age limit to 23.

- Publication of 'local offer to care leavers' – legal entitlements plus any discretionary support

- Leaving care grant (£2,000) to help the young person furnish their first home.

- £2,000 bursary to care leavers who attend university.

- 'Staying Close' pilots from 2107 ('not simply a housing offer. It is a model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put') (DfE, 2023)

Understanding the impact of reforms

- 'Policy tends to have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach' that underestimates the need for tailored responses to meet the heterogenous needs and circumstances of young people leaving care (Marion and Paulson, 2019, p.123).

- Staying Put (foster care from 18 up to 21) a key legislative reform – only those in foster care eligible

- Evaluation of the Staying Put pilot: Qualitative findings revealed that the majority of young people judged to have a strong and secure base within their current foster placement, opted to stay put (Munro et al., 2012).

- Evaluations on recent leaving care innovations have typically been small-scale, often single site and have predominantly relied upon qualitative data due to challenges securing sufficient quantitative data for analysis (Lynch et al., 2021; Alderson et al., 2023).

- Gaps in understanding similarities and differences in pathways out of care from 16+, with reference to young people's characteristics and in-care histories
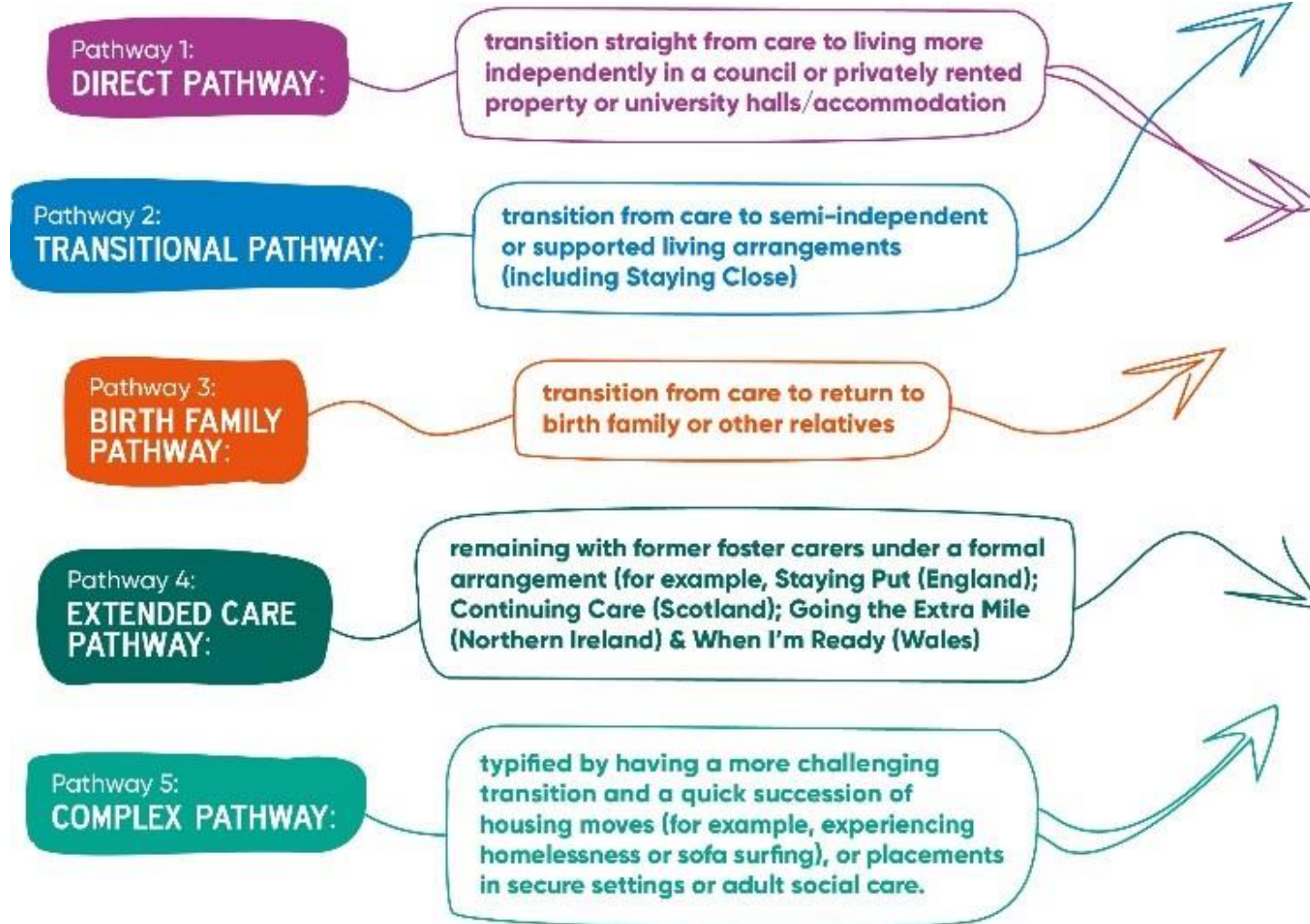
Management information system data

- Under-utilization of management information system data as a resource at the local and regional levels

- Every local authority in England is required to collect management information system data on children in out of home care and care leavers for the national statistical returns.

- Information on children's age, gender, home postcode, main reason for entry to care ('need code'), changes of placement and/or legal status ('episode data') and exit codes (SSDA903 data).

- Monitoring data on care leavers is also collected including: whether the local authority is 'in-touch' with them; education, employment and training status; what type of accommodation they are living in, and whether it is judged to be suitable accommodation (OC3 data).

Care leavers, COVID-19 and the transition from Care (CCTC) study (ESRC funded)

- Mixed methods study which aimed to explore care leavers' transitions to adulthood in the context of COVID-19

- Focus of presentation: analysis of quantitative management information system data on 1338 care leavers from 10 local authorities.

- Interested in exploring pathways of 16+ and where young people were living (experiential as distinct from whether or not they were 'technically' still looked after or not)

- LAs were invited to record the primary pathway out of care for young people who left care (turned 18) or moved into semi-independent accommodation or returned home to birth family (aged 16-17) during 2020

Pathways out of care

Pathway 1:
DIRECT PATHWAY:
transition straight from care to living more independently in a council or privately rented property or university halls/accommodation

Pathway 2:
TRANSITIONAL PATHWAY:
transition from care to semi-independent or supported living arrangements (including Staying Close)

Pathway 3:
BIRTH FAMILY PATHWAY:
transition from care to return to birth family or other relatives

Pathway 4:
EXTENDED CARE PATHWAY:
remaining with former foster carers under a formal arrangement (for example, Staying Put (England); Continuing Care (Scotland); Going the Extra Mile (Northern Ireland) & When I'm Ready (Wales)

Pathway 5:
COMPLEX PATHWAY:
typified by having a more challenging transition and a quick succession of housing moves (for example, experiencing homelessness or sofa surfing), or placements in secure settings or adult social care.

Pathways

- Longstanding discourse that young people should 'remain in care' until 18 at a minimum and benefits of Staying Put post-18

- 'Extended care' pathway denotes formal extension of foster care placement beyond 18 (as distinct from aftercare services – recognise wide variation in conceptualisations internationally)

- Transitional pathway – semi-independent or supported lodgings, including self-contained flats, hostels or foyers

- Unregulated provision – wide variations in quality of provision under this umbrella and the level of 'support' (or lack thereof) provided in these types of settings (Article 39; Become, 2022, Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020).

- Caution against blanket assumptions that certain pathways are preferable to others

- Suitability of arrangements will depend on individual needs, circumstances and the quality of care provided

Findings

Pathway	Percentage following each pathway (%)	Range across 10 local authorities (%)
Transitional	49	27-78
Direct	18	2-39
Extended care	14	5-29
Birth family	9	2-16
Complex	8	4-14
Other/missing	2	0-10
Total	**100**	

Selected headline messages

- The transitional pathway (semi-independent/supported accommodation) was the most common in 8 of our 10 local authorities.

- In four out of the 10 local authorities two-thirds of the leaving care cohort followed the transitional pathway (majority aged 16-17)

- Differences in the rationale for the use of semi-independent/supported accommodation, length of stay, level of support and suitability

Positive perspectives

- A bridge to greater independence

- Supported lodgings (part of the family and a buffer during COVID-19)

- Placement choice and appropriate support

> *Some are well into their 20s and are still in our supported accommodation…the work is based around transitions into their own properties, that's a plan we're working on quite early on, but we'll spend two, three or four years working towards that end goal*

Leaving Care Manager

Alternative perspectives: Instability and change as a 'bridge to independence' at 18

> *We find that quite a lot of our 18-year-olds are not ready to move on…hence we put a package in place to move them into semi-independent or shared accommodation at 18, for a period of anything between* **one** *to* **three** *months*

Leaving Care Manager

> *They've got three moves in a fairly short space of time which is quite unsettling than then they don't know which other plans they should make, 'Which college should I apply for?', 'What am I going to do?' 'How am I going to see my friends?', How far away am I going to be from my family?' and all those kinds of questions.*

Leaving Care Manager

Poor provision, lack of protection or participation

" *We know he's not going to manage in the [supported accommodation], he already has gang associates, he's already at risk of exploitation, why put him in an area when we know there's a risk of that from the work, we've done with him…But they will say 'it's the only option so they have to go there'. And a lot of the time you'll get the young person saying I don't want to go there'* "

Personal Adviser

It was a horrible dirty flat, I was worried that at any point somebody was just going to come in and tell me that I needed to pack my stuff…I'd call up ask and I'd just get put through to the duty manager. When I did finally move, I said I don't want to be in this place, I was, 'Can you please look for somewhere else'? And they were like, 'No, it's either here or you're going to be on the streets.

Steven

Selected headline messages

- Wide variations in the percentage of young people following different pathways in different local authorities (one or two 'default pathways' or a choice of options?)

- The characteristics of those most likely to enter Staying Put arrangements (extended care pathway) were females, and younger entrants to care who were significantly more likely to have had fewer placement moves compared to those who exited via the direct pathway

- Young people placed in children's homes were significantly more likely to follow the complex pathway.

- Significantly greater likelihood of following the complex pathway amongst young people with disabilities and young people admitted to care due to 'socially unacceptable behaviour'

- Those following the complex pathway were significantly less likely to be in education and employment

Reflections

- Value of analysis of existing management information system data sets to explore variations in practice and to inform service planning and the design of services and support for young people with diverse needs

- Limited suite of outcome measures included in the statistical returns

- Need to recognise different purposes for collecting outcome data

- Policy level: Need for public accountability, value for money and social value for citizens (Osborne & Brown, 2011).

- National/policy level privileges categorical top-line data such as Employment, Education, Training (EET) & can be perceived as 'deficit' orientated and stigmatising (Johnson & Kerridge, 2023)

- Local practice and individual level outcomes also important (ibid)

- Care leaver journeys are diverse and subjective and value in exploring what outcomes are important to them (Bakketeig et al, 2020).
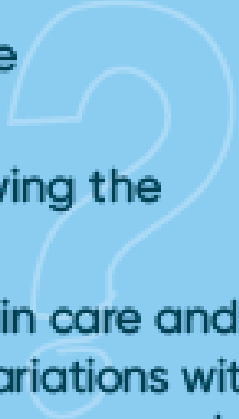
Reflections: CCTC Networked learning community

- Call for more balanced data sets: Shift the focus from predominantly negative aspects (e.g. substance misuse and convictions) to include positive aspects of a young person's life.

- Holistic well-being and health data: Collect data on the well-being and health of care leavers. This should encompass not only physical health but also mental, emotional well-being and quality of life

- Involvement and listening to lived experience: Include data on whether young people are actively involved in decision-making processes

- Satisfaction with services: Introduce a measure to assess care leavers' satisfaction with the services they receive.

Conclusion

- Pre- and in-care decision-making and practice are influential: 'leaving care' should not be seen in isolation

- Inverse care law (greatest need/least care)

- Need to move beyond considering care leavers as a 'homogenous group' and tailor services and support accordingly

- Mismatch between policy intent and practice (enduring challenges e.g. placement availability, choice and quality; continuity of relationships and trust; integrated working)

- 'Hidden' and high use of semi-independent accommodation for 16-17 year olds

- Expectation of 'independence' at or before 18 rather than 'interdependence'

- Importance of proactively promoting informal support networks not only formal (time-limited)

- Need to consider intersectional disadvantages

- Greater intentionality and use of implementation science to support developments

QUESTIONS FOR SERVICES

- Do you know how many of your young people follow the different pathways out of care?

- Do your policies meet the needs of young people following the different pathways?

- Can you make greater use of your local data on children in care and care leavers to examine pathways out of care and any variations with reference to individual characteristics, reasons for entry to care and in-care histories?

- Looking at the messages to the 'big boss' – what can you do differently in response to care leavers' ideas about what needs to improve?

MESSAGES TO THE BIG BOSS

Care leavers taking part in the CCTC study were asked for their *ideas about how to improve support to care leavers –* what would they like the 'big boss' to do differently?

- **Listen to me and hear what I'm saying**
- **Ask me if I need extra support (with my education or to do hobbies and fun things)**
- **Make sure I've got people around me I can rely on**
- **Keep doing the things you are doing well**
- **Check if my worker and I get on well**
- **Stay in touch with me but ask me about the best way to do this**
- **Remember what happens whilst I'm in care affects my life after care (so make that better too)**
- **Stick with me**
- **Increase the amount of money you give me so it really covers the costs of what I need**
- **Simplify services so they are less complicated to get and understand**
- **Try to get things done quicker & if you can't do that keep me updated on what's happening**
- **Don't get me to leave care just because of my age**
- **Find ways to help me settle in a new area so I know what there is to do & how to meet new people**

I THINK CORPORATE PARENTING TEAMS SHOULD TRY TO INPUT WHAT A REAL PERSON PARENTING THEIR REAL CHILDREN WOULD DO.

I'D JUST SAY TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE THE CHILD'S BEST INTERESTS AT HEART, INSTEAD OF JUST TRYING TO GET EVERYTHING OUT OF THE WAY THAT YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF THE WAY. SO MAKING SURE THAT YOU DON'T SPEAK TO SOMEONE JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO

THEY NEED TO GIVE US SOME MORE TIME... WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO GROW UP AS SOON AS WE HIT 18, WHEREAS OTHER PEOPLE DON'T. I FEEL LIKE IT'S QUITE RUBBISH.

TO BE HONEST I WOULD SAY FOR LIKE THE SOCIAL WORKER PART, TO HAVE MORE OF A LOOK AT THE YOUNG PERSON THAT YOU'RE MATCHING THE SOCIAL WORKER WITH.

IF YOU LIVE IN A FOSTER FAMILY YOU'RE HAVING A HARD TIME WITH YOUR LIFE, THAT'S WHY YOU'RE LIVING THERE TO HELP YOU. I REALLY WANT TO SAY THAT SOCIAL WORKERS SHOULD PROVIDE SUPPORT AND PROVIDE EVERY SINGLE THING THEY NEED.

IT'S NOT THE LEAVING CARE SERVICE THAT'S THE PROBLEM, IT'S MAINLY THE ACTUAL CARE SERVICE ITSELF.

TRY AND HELP PEOPLE OUT WHEN THEY NEED IT AND REALLY THAT'S IT.

WHEN IT ACTUALLY COMES TO THE POSSIBILITY OF CONSIDERING LEAVING CARE, THEY DO NEED TO LISTEN TO THE KID MORE, TO THE CHILD WHOSE LIFE IS GOING TO BE CHANGED AND UNDERSTAND THAT THEY'RE ALSO GOING TO HAVE QUESTIONS THAT THEY'RE SCARED TO ASK.

OECD webinar series

- **Webinar 2:** 'What matters to care-experienced young people?' which will involve hearing from young people themselves will be held on **Monday 20 November.**

- **Webinar 3:** 'What helps or hinders effective implementation?' is an introduction to key ingredients to conceive, implement and sustain innovation to support transitions from care to adulthood. This webinar will be held on **Wednesday 10 January.**

- Invitations from OECD to follow

Outputs

Available from:

https://www.beds.ac.uk/goldbergcentre/research/goldberg-current-research/cctc/

- Munro, E. R., Friel, S., Baker, C., Lynch, A., Walker, K., Williams, J., Cook, E., Chater, A., (2022). *Care leavers' transitions to adulthood in the context of COVID-19: Understanding pathways, experiences and outcomes to improve policy and practice.* Luton: University of Bedfordshire

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- Munro, E.R., Friel, S., Baker, C. and Newlands, F. (forthcoming, 2023) Adapting services and support for young people negotiating the transition from care to adulthood in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Krsaklewska, E., Stapleton, A., Tillmann, F. and Williamson, H. (eds.) *Youth Transitions in COVID.* European Commission and Council of Europe.

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