

ABERLOUR CHILD CARE TRUST'S SUBMISSION

Introduction

As Scotland's largest, solely Scottish Children's Charity, we warmly welcome the attention afforded by the Equal Opportunities Committee to this critical issue. Homelessness in young people remains a significant problem in our society and has a serious and demonstrable risk to those young people's health, their emotional development, their educational attainment and their exposure to abuse and risky behaviour. The Scottish Parliament and Government are seeking to resolve many of these associated problems through other initiatives. As such we ask that youth homelessness not be considered in isolation and that the committee link any recommendations from this inquiry into ongoing policy efforts to tackle these related issues such as the Mental Health Strategy, the Youth Employment strategy and the forthcoming iteration of *Getting Our Priorities Right*.

Across our service portfolio we come up against issues and life circumstances which without adequate intervention could act as triggers for homelessness. As such we have many practice examples and evidence of our work that has a direct impact on youth homelessness and whilst space does not allow a full exploration of these in this submission, we would welcome the opportunity to make further representations to the committee either in oral or further written evidence. We call on the committee to consider the following action:

- Commission a new national audit of the prevalence and profile of young people who runaway in Scotland and its link to homelessness
- Hypothecate local outcomes and indicators that Scottish Local Authorities can include as part of their 2012 Single Outcome Agreement to make provision for and target a reduction in the numbers of young people who run away
- Revisit the 23 recommendations from *Sweet 16? The Age of Leaving Care* alongside the subsequent recommendations within "These Are Our Bairns". All young people should be supported to leave care when they are ready. The expectation that "moving on" is considered from 16 should be removed
- Link adequate housing support to the increasing focus on throughcare and aftercare for Scotland's care leavers whilst ensuring that this allows for a timely transition and sustained contact to the main carers (including relevant family)

Preventing homelessness 1: working with young runaways

As a social care provider, delivering residential and community based services to vulnerable young people and their families across Scotland, Aberlour has direct practice experience of supporting young runaways through its dedicated runaways service *Running: Other Choices* (ROC) based in the west of

Scotland. This provision sits in the realm of child protection however it has close links to the accommodation needs of young people aged over 16. Its work connects directly into the preventative spending agenda as we offer a suite of interventions which can help to resolve the root causes of running away, which provide sustainable solutions to the life circumstances of these vulnerable children and young people and in many cases prevent the likelihood that they will become homeless.

The link between running and homelessness:

In 2011 Shelter Scotland published *Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?* This document linked youth homelessness beyond the age of 16 to running away before the age of 16. This piece of research underpins our practice belief in the correlation between running away and youth homelessness and the fact that these young people are experiencing complex family relationships, often with parental issues of alcohol, drug misuse and mental health issues and the conflict and stressors that such bring.

‘The study highlighted that the vast majority of young homeless people (84 per cent) had also run away before the age of 16. This is considerably higher than the national rate of running away which is estimated at 11 per cent. Over half of young homeless people who ran away had been forced to leave home. This group is also likely to repeatedly run away, with one in three running at least ten times and half staying away for more than four weeks.’

What we know about young people who run away:

Aberlour linked up with The Children’s Society in England, an organisation with a history of runaways services, and the resultant research *Still Running: Children on the streets in the UK, 1999*, became the first national research into young runaways. In order to determine a Scottish perspective and establish if there were similar themes and patterns Aberlour commissioned *Missing Out: Young Runaways in Scotland*, Wade, J. (2001) Stirling: Aberlour Child Care Trust which highlights:

‘One in nine children (11%) in Scotland run away or are forced to leave home before the age of 16 due to difficulties in their lives. It is very rare for young people to run away for excitement. The main reasons young people gave included family conflict and instability, violence, emotional abuse and neglect. Missing Out estimates that:

- 6000 – 7000 Children under 16 run away every year in Scotland for the first time
- 9000 Children run away each year, including those who have run away more than once
- Although most young people reported having run away, one in seven had been forced to leave before the age of 16’ - Missing Out: Young Runaways in Scotland, Wade, J. (2001)

ROC: Aberlour's service for young runaways:

The ROC service is an initiative developed by Aberlour following on from senior officer awareness and concern about the lack of dedicated resources for this vulnerable group and awareness of the risks associated with running away for those young people aged under 16 years. This practice experience in both the statutory and voluntary sectors as well as a number of high profile inquiries into missing young people, including the inquiry into the West murders in the 1990s inspired Aberlour to develop its practice in this field and pursue an evidence base for its work. The service, whilst located in the Greater Glasgow area, works with any young person who presents and is Scotland's only provider of a range of dedicated services to young runaways, and the only provider of refuge accommodation.

In 2001 the ROC service was set up in Glasgow initially to work with young people who had run away and who had been returned to their usual living setting. The experience of the young people during periods of running away – i.e. assault, rape, rough sleeping, inspired the organisation to pursue funding to develop safe refuge provision. The publication of *Vulnerable Children: Young Runaways And Children Abused Through Prostitution, Scottish Executive 2002* notes:

'Children are at the heart of the Executive's agenda and the work on young runaways and children sexually exploited through prostitution should not be seen in isolation'

In 2003 with funding made available through the Youth Crime Prevention fund from the Scottish Executive Aberlour set up safe refuge accommodation in terms of S38 of The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the refuge became operational in July 2004. It was deemed a 'National demonstration project' by the Executive and externally evaluated by Stirling University, *Evaluation of Four Youth Crime Prevention Funded Projects for the Aberlour Child Care Trust, 2006* which states:

'The refuge appears to have been successful in achieving the following objectives: Keeping young people safe; Engaging effectively with young people; Providing more detailed assessment of young people and their situations e.g. eating disorder, child protection concerns; Developing positive relationships with young people; Supporting young people to make decisions; Providing young people with information about other options available to them'

The service has been funded predominantly via individual and corporate partnerships, charitable funders such as Big and Children In Need and the STV/Hunter Appeal 2011, Aviva and the Railway Children as well as receiving spot purchase income for refuge accommodation from the responsible Local Authority.

Who we work with and how we help them

Since 2004 the refuge has provided short term safe accommodation for over 320 individual young people, providing over 440 distinct periods of refuge accommodation. The service maintains a database to assist in evaluation with records consistently indicating that breakdown in parental/carer relationships is a significant factor, with over 80% of young people referring to this as one of the main drivers in their running away behaviour. The service has noted that refuge is accessed predominantly by 14/15 year old females and by young people who are living in lone parent or reconstituted family situations.

In 2010 Aberlour commissioned *Evidence, Outcomes and Costs: ROC Refuge, Smeaton.E:*

‘The ROC Refuge operates in a manner that is consistent with evidence-based good practice. For example:

- The majority of children and young people who stay in refuge move on to safe accommodation with a plan in place.’

Since its inception Aberlour’s runaway service has developed a suite of services to work with young runaways: Personal Social Education (P.S.E.), 1:1 outreach support, safe refuge accommodation, volunteering within the service and currently Aberlour is developing a Return Home Welfare Interview (R.H.W.I) project in partnership with Strathclyde Police and Glasgow City Social Work Services.

Outreach and awareness raising

The ROC service delivers an outreach service to local schools with a Personal and Social Education package which is designed to build awareness of the refuge, the issues and risks associated with running away and youth homelessness. The P.S.E. package is delivered across 14 of Glasgow secondary schools and in South Lanarkshire. It is compliant with the Curriculum for Excellence and offers young people in the S2 year group an opportunity to explore why young people run away, the risks and prevalence of running away in Scotland as well as highlighting the services and resources that young people can access in order to keep themselves safe. This has impacted positively on both the young people and teaching personnel developing their awareness of risk, family difficulties and resolutions. Feedback from young people and teaching staff has been very positive with increasing numbers of schools requesting the input.

In community support and returning home:

Over and above the provision of refuge, the service supports young people in their own communities, either pre or post accommodation in the refuge, working with approximately 20 young people every year. This work is to support young people in their usual living environments, address areas such as their self esteem, parental/carer relationships, education and health. We work toward

empowering young people to access relevant support in order to enhance their overall wellbeing and assist in the transition from childhood to adulthood. We build relationships based on respect and help young people to see the potential they have through a holistic package of support. We are in the process of establishing a Return Home Welfare Interview project through the ROC service in the East end of Glasgow to work alongside Strathclyde Police and Glasgow Social Work services in targeting those young people who have been reported as missing to reduce the recurrence of missing periods and prevent them from coming to risk of harm. This development has its basis in the Scottish Government's Young Runaways in Grampian Pilot, 2010.

Preventing homelessness 2: support at transitions

Much of the positive work and support that we offer can be undone if, on exiting our service, inadequate support exists to connect service users to routes into employment and adequate housing, given the inexorable link between the social problems we work with and homelessness in young people.

Transitional support for young people leaving care:

Building resilience through the provision of therapeutic and stable residential and foster placements, as we have done in over 28 years of provision at our Fife based Sycamore Services, helps to prepare young people for the challenges of independent living. The link between placement stability and long term outcomes for young people leaving care is widely acknowledged (Forrester (2009), In Loco Parentis (2010)). Within our services children and young people use the safety of a stable therapeutic environment to build confidence, learn to cope with the legacy of trauma and/or neglect and flourish in a community based setting. Regrettably the pressures which were highlighted so clearly within the SCCYP report "Sweet 16" in 2008 have if anything increased over recent years. Young people are faced with the need to discuss options for 'moving on' well in advance of their 16th birthday. The challenges and uncertainty introduced by this can significantly increase anxiety. We know that the impact of the recent financial crisis means young people generally are staying at home for longer and often well into their twenties yet we expect the most vulnerable and traumatised young people in the country to engage with the challenges of independent living from as young as 16.

Throughcare and Aftercare is an integrated element of Aberlour Sycamore Services and workers are known to all young people. We believe it is as important to offer high quality support during the five years after leaving care as it is during the first five years of life. On some occasions we are able to offer planned through-care support however this has been happening less often as Local Authorities often opt to use existing in-house services. Sycamore has a philosophy of "once a Sycamore child, always a Sycamore child" meaning that young people are aware that they can come back to seek support at any time. As a result our aftercare workers often offer support to young people who return after existing arrangements have broken down. This may involve anything from a couple of nights in our Family Resource Centre, to resettlement support or a package of housing support locally. Young people regularly report the

significance of knowing there is someone they can turn to in a crisis. Our experience suggests that housing support and homelessness services are often located close to population centres. This often means that young people returning to their home authority can find themselves isolated from both family and their previous carers, which when coupled with inadequate housing support can significantly increase risks of homelessness and a range of other negative social outcomes.

Young people who experience timely and well supported transitions can be supported to build on existing resilience factors and minimise anxiety. This has the potential to help them build confidence through supported accommodation and into a sustainable tenancy. Confidence and resilience also have the potential to improve outcomes in relation to education, employment and training.

Transitional support for families affected by parental substance misuse:

The evidence of decline in service user outcomes in the final month of our six month dependency residential treatment programme is often a direct result of a failure to ensure cross agency working. All too often inappropriate accommodation and a lack of ongoing support can begin to unravel much of the good work delivered by our service. Many of the young women and their children who have benefited from our service, the majority of whom have shown tangible progress, return to the communities and settings where they find all the toxic factors that brought about substance misuse in the first place. The connection between these factors and homelessness both for mothers and their children is well documented.

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