

The Care Commission

BULLETIN

Throughcare and aftercare provided for children and young people in residential care. Are services meeting the standards?

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Introduction

This bulletin looks at the arrangements for throughcare and aftercare of children and young people who are looked after away from home in residential services and how and whether young people's needs are met. It is based on information we have gathered during our inspection, investigation and enforcement activities during 2007-08. It highlights what needs to be done to improve practices in these services in two ways.

- It provides information about what we have learnt from regulating and inspecting residential children's and young people's care homes, residential special schools and secure accommodation services between April 2007 and March 2008.
- It shares the main lessons on what needs to be done to improve practice in residential settings and to promote good throughcare and aftercare for children and young people who are looked after away from home.

Who we are and what we do

The Care Commission was set up in 2002 to help improve care services in Scotland. We register and inspect around 15,000 services that care for more than 320,000 people in all parts of Scotland. These services include childminders, foster care and adoption services, nurseries, daycare services, care homes and private hospitals.

As Scotland's national care regulator, we register and inspect services, investigate complaints and, where necessary, take legal action to make sure a service is meeting the standard of care it should be. We publish our findings in inspection reports to encourage services to improve the quality of the care they provide.

We also publish reports that give a national picture of the availability and quality of care services.

What this bulletin is about

This bulletin looks at the quality of throughcare and aftercare service provided to children and young people who are looked after away from home in residential services. It is based on our work with the following services:

- care homes
- residential special schools
- secure accommodation services.

The **Pathways Handbook**¹ says that:

Throughcare is the ongoing preparation and support of young people who have been looked after and may soon be making the transition to live more independently.

Aftercare is the continuing support, planning and guidance for a young person who has left care or a supported living environment.

¹ Pathways Handbook, Scottish Executive, 2004.



Why we have published this bulletin

Scottish Ministers have set a broad vision of expectations and aspirations for young people; namely that they are safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, respected, responsible and included. However, **The Health of Looked After and Accommodated Children and Young People in Scotland**² noted that research on the mental health of children and young people who are looked after away from home has shown that they are doing less well than their peers: a particularly vulnerable group is those young people, still in their teens who leave care and move to independent living. This was specifically acknowledged in **Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland**³ (which contains **The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003**). This reinforced the duty on local authorities to prepare young people for ceasing to be looked after and to provide advice, guidance and assistance for young people who have ceased to be looked after over school age. This was followed up by the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Association's **How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?**⁴ which gives detailed quality indicators for best practice.

The Regulations for young people ceasing to be looked after by local authorities place a duty on local authorities to carry out a pathway assessment for aftercare services on young people who are **over school leaving age but are still looked after**. Scottish Government has provided a handbook to local authorities covering all of the areas set out in regulation and which local authorities need to address. This is called **Pathways** and includes:

- Pathway Views – the views of the young person
- Pathway Assessment – the assessment of the young person's needs
- Pathway Plan – how the local authority plans to meet these needs.

It does not, therefore, apply to all young people living in residential care services.

The strategy **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better**⁵ identifies five key themes which impact upon the lives of looked after children and young people. One of these themes is **Developing into Successful and Responsible Adults** and Actions 12–14 within the strategy identified measures which Scottish Government will take to support young people who leave residential services:

² The health of looked after and accommodated children and young people in Scotland, SWIA 2006.

³ Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland, Scottish Executive 2004.

⁴ How Good is Your Throughcare and aftercare Service? Quality indicators for Best Practice Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum, 2006.

⁵ Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better, Scottish Executive 2007.

Action 12: encourage local authorities to use existing powers to provide appropriate financial support for care leavers who are in full-time education, training or a modern apprenticeship.

Action 13: work with colleges and universities to raise awareness and responsiveness to the issues faced by care leavers who enter further or higher education.

Action 14: commission the development of a resource pack for looked after young people and care leavers which will provide them with information relevant to their transition into adulthood.

However, the report by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, **Sweet 16?**⁶ identified that:

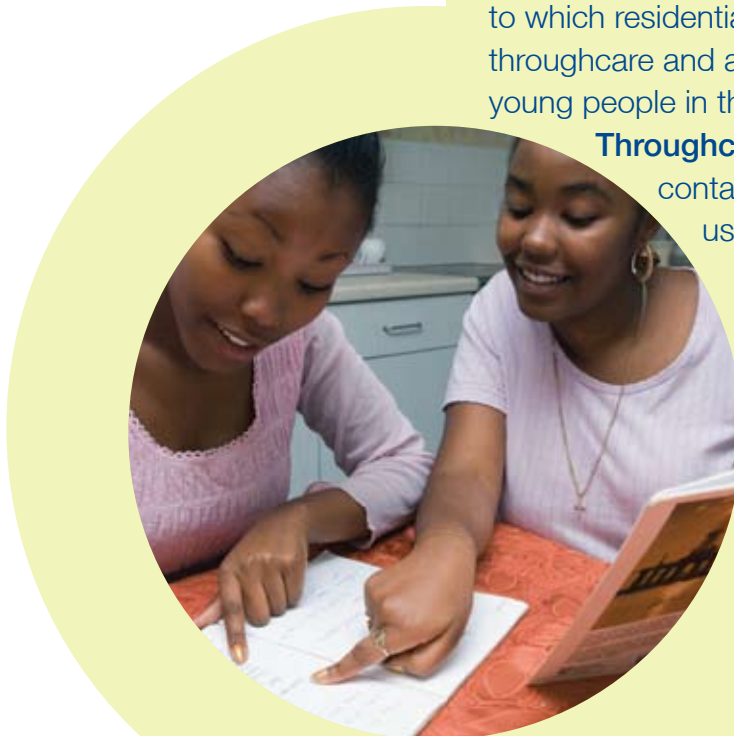
- there is still a culture where the age of leaving care is 16
- a number of young people leaving care end up inappropriately in bed and breakfast accommodation or homeless hostels
- too many staff and young people lack accurate information about what young people are entitled to and can expect.

These are Our Bairns⁷ seeks to address these concerns by focusing on the corporate parenting responsibility of local authorities and associated agencies who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of children and young people who are looked after away from home and those leaving care.

This bulletin provides information on the extent to which residential care services meet the throughcare and aftercare needs of children and young people in their care. **How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?**

How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?

contains quality indicators which we used as the basis for our questions on this topic when inspecting residential care services.



⁶ Sweet 16? The Age of Leaving Care in Scotland, SCCYP 2008.

⁷ These are Our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being good corporate parent, Scottish Government 2008.



What the National Care Standards say

National Care Standards set out the standard of care that people can expect from any care services they use. Two sets of National Care Standards describe the standards which children and young people who are looked after away from home can expect in:

- care homes for children and young people
- school care accommodation services

These are available on our website (www.carecommission.com)

According to the National Care Standards, children and young people who are looked after away from home can expect to be supported to move on from their residential service.

Moving On

National Care Standard 17(care homes for children and young people) –

You have every opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge you need to move on and, where needed, to live more independently. You are helped to develop the employment, study and social skills you need for the next stage of your life.

Leaving School

National Care Standard 16 (school care accommodation services) –

You have every opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge you need to live more independently when you leave school. You are helped to develop the employment, study and social skills you need for the next stage of your life.



How we carried out this study

This section considers:

- What information we looked at
- How many services there are.



The information we looked at

During our inspections in 2007-08 our Care Commission officers, (CCOs) asked residential services for children and young people how they supported children and young people with throughcare and aftercare. They then checked what they were told by:

- talking to children and young people who are looked after away from home
- talking to service managers and staff
- observing practice
- talking to other professionals
- talking to parents and carers.

After their inspection, each care service receives an inspection report. If we identify that a service needs to improve the care it provides, our report includes recommendations or requirements we think it should take.

If we feel that a service should make improvements to meet the National Care Standards then we make a **recommendation**. If a service is not complying with the regulations set out in the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, then we make a **requirement**. Inspection reports are available on our website: www.carecommission.com

We also have a legal power of **enforcement**, which means we can:

- vary or impose new conditions that services must meet to be registered with us
- serve a legal notice that requires services to make improvements within a set timescale
- cancel a service's registration.

In addition to our inspections we consider all complaints about this area, and our enforcement activity in it.



How many services are there

In 2007/08 there were 240 residential services for children and young people who are looked after away from home. These services were:

- 197 care homes
- 37 residential special schools
- 6 secure accommodation services.

We did not include in this figure those services which were registered or cancelled during the inspection year.



We did not include fostering services as the Care Commission only began to inspect these services in 2006/07 and published a report on the findings of our first year of inspections of these services in November 2007.

What did we find?

For this bulletin, we considered two sets of questions charting a young person's progress through the residential service. These were:

1. Throughcare and aftercare policy and implementation
2. Pathway Planning

In total, we made 183 requirements or recommendations across the 240 services inspected.

1. Throughcare and aftercare policy and implementation

- a) Does the care service have an appropriate policy on throughcare and aftercare?

We made recommendations in 21 services (9%) where there was no policy on throughcare and aftercare. Although this was a small proportion of the total number of services, we are concerned that any service should not have a policy in this crucial area, particularly given the research and Government guidance available.

- b) Are staff made aware of this policy?

In 12 services (5%) staff were unaware of any policy on throughcare and aftercare. Again, although this is a very small proportion of the total number of services, we are concerned that any staff were unaware of their organisation's policy in this area. It implies that either staff are providing throughcare and after care services without referring to the wider organisation's policies or it is not being done at all.

- c) Is there guidance for staff on throughcare and aftercare to ensure consistent practice?

We made recommendations in three services (1.5%) where there was no guidance available. The overwhelming majority of services therefore had guidance for staff and the three services where this was not provided needed to address this with some urgency.



- d) Does the service use the best practice publication “How Good is Your Through Care and After Care Service”?

This document, with its set of quality indicators, was written by the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum and has been endorsed and supported by Scottish Government and the Care Commission. It is disappointing, therefore, that 37 services (15%) did not use this. As a result, the quality of support provided (and subsequent outcomes) to young people is likely to be poorer.

- e) Are staff trained on throughcare and aftercare policies?

41 services (17%) received either a requirement or a recommendation as a result of this question. If staff are not trained in this area, they will be unable to adequately support young people with either their throughcare or aftercare. This confirmed the findings of the Sweet 16? report, which identified a lack of knowledge from staff about what young people were entitled to and reinforces the report’s recommendation that workers need to be trained and informed about young people’s rights and are able to pass the information to young people.

- f) Are throughcare and aftercare policies, guidance and practice regularly reviewed in light of outcomes for young people?

29 services (12%) needed to improve their reviewing of policies, guidance and practice. There has been continued development of guidance in this area over the past 10 years and services needed to ensure that their policies and practice were both up to date and effective. Those services which did not review these were disadvantaging the young people in their care and the staff who work with them.

- g) Are young people supported to leave the service?

Research has shown how poorly equipped many young people leaving care are to cope with life after being looked after away from home: practically, emotionally and educationally. This has implications for their subsequent experiences of loneliness, isolation and poor mental health. The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People has reported⁸ that children and young people who are looked after away from home are being “pushed out” of care and “onto the streets,” usually at the age of 16. This was supported in our findings where we made requirements or recommendations in 119 (50%) services where they were not adequately helping young people leave appropriately.



2. Pathway Planning

- a) Are staff aware of the pathway planning process?

In 4 services (1.5%) of services, staff were not aware of the planning process and we made recommendations accordingly. In the overwhelming majority of services, therefore, staff knew about pathway planning.

- b) Do services have a role in pathway planning?

5 services (2%) did not have a role in pathway planning. This is contrary to the best practice quality indicators “How Good is our Throughcare and Aftercare” which states:

“No one agency or team should have sole responsibility to provide for the needs of looked after young people. Agencies must work effectively together...”

It was reassuring that almost all residential services were involved in the process but it is concerning that this small number were not.

- c) Do young people have their own copy of pathway views?

In 10 services (4%) we made recommendations that young people should have a copy of their views. The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations 2003 states that “the responsible authority shall take into account the pathway views of the young person and that a written record is maintained of the pathway plan”. It would therefore be appropriate for young people to have a copy of their views and, in the majority of services, this was happening.

- d) Do staff involve young people in plans for moving on?

In 6 services (2.5%), we found that this did not happen. This relates to reviews of the pathway plan and the need to carry out reviews at least every 6 months (or if the young person, their supporter or the pathways coordinator asks for one). Young people should always be involved in this unless they refuse and the onus is on the authority to find an acceptable way of reviewing the plan with them. It should be the exception that the young person is not involved and this appeared to be the case.

- e) Does the pathway plan specify the formal support roles once the young person is no longer looked after away from home?



In 7 services (3%) staff were not identified as having a formal support role. This does not reflect the statistical returns which local authorities make to government. These indicate that a quarter of children and young people looked after away from home have neither a pathways coordinator nor a pathways plan. (CLAS, November 2008) It may be that, in the absence of these, responsibility for planning has been taken on by staff.

- f) Are young people encouraged to keep in touch with the service after they have left?

All services said that they encourage young people to keep in touch after they have left and this is commended. Perhaps, however, the issue is not one of keeping in touch but of being able to return to their place of care for overnight stays, in the way most young people who have not been looked after away from home are able to do within their parental home. This would provide a much greater challenge to residential services but would also provide a much greater feeling of security to young people to know that there is a place to which they can return to stay for a short period when they need to.



Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the principles of throughcare and aftercare appear to be met in most residential care services. In particular, staff generally seemed to have guidance available to them to ensure consistent good practice. With regard to pathway planning, staff generally seemed aware of the planning process and young people did seem to be encouraged to keep in touch with the service when they left. However, despite this, almost half the residential services for children and young people needed to improve their ability to help and support young people when they move on.

Research indicates poor outcomes for many young people who have been looked after away from home. In order to begin to turn this around, young people need to be appropriately supported, not just while they are living in a service but after they have left as well. The promotion of corporate parenting within local authorities may help protect young people and ensure that they are properly supported and not left to their own devices once they have left their residential service.

What should happen next

All people and organisations providing residential care for children and young people should:

- develop an appropriate policy on throughcare and aftercare
- use the good practice guidance *How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?*
- train staff on throughcare and aftercare policies
- regularly review throughcare and aftercare policies and the resulting practice, in light of outcomes for young people
- involve young people more in their pathway planning, both while living in the service and after they have left
- provide more support for young people moving on from their service.

We should

- check that all requirements and recommendations we have issued have been addressed by services
- work with service providers and partnership organisations to continue to promote the good practice guidance *How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?*
- provide information to government about the extent of good practice across Scotland.

☐ HEADQUARTERS

Care Commission
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY
Tel: 01382 207100
Fax: 01382 207289
Lo-call: 0845 603 0890
enquiries@carecommission.com
www.carecommission.com

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