Overseen but often overlooked

Children and young people ‘looked after at home’ in Scotland

Believe in children
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Written by Barnardo’s Scotland staff in collaboration with the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland at Strathclyde University
Foreword

In 2013 Barnardo’s Scotland staff were asked to identify groups of children in Scotland whom they felt had the greatest unmet need. Children looked after at home – those 4,000 plus children who are looked after by the state, but still live at home with their parents – were consistently identified as one of the groups most in need of extra support. Many Barnardo’s services work with young people who are or were looked after at home, but normally in the context of another issue in the young person’s life – such as supporting them into employment, addressing issues at school or tackling anti-social behaviour. However, the consistent message from our services was that the support these children got was often inadequate, and the care setting (living at home with their family) can be inappropriate.

This message has been confirmed in a series of reports commissioned by Barnardo’s Scotland from the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS) at Strathclyde University. These show that, while these young people may well be overseen by the state, their needs are often overlooked.

This suggests that our system of children being ‘looked after at home’ is failing some of the most vulnerable children in Scotland. Over recent years these children have represented between a third and a quarter of all looked after children in Scotland, and they often experience some of the worst outcomes. In general these are children on the edge of the most intensive forms of care, and we know that if we fail to provide effective support to children who are looked after at home we risk having to invest much more in support when their vulnerability turns to crisis.

Barnardo’s Scotland is an enthusiastic partner in the development of the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach in Scotland. I chaired the Scottish Government’s National GIRFEC Programme board from 2011 to 2013, and Barnardo’s is actively involved in assisting the Scottish Government to turn the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 into reality. Major changes to the Children’s Hearing system were introduced in 2011, and are also currently bedding in. But even after taking these recent developments into consideration, it is clear to me that more will still need to be done to address the current lack of support for children looked after at home. Indeed, we will need to get the GIRFEC approach working effectively on the ground for this group of vulnerable but monitored children if we are to have any hope of making it work for the children and families where there is no measure of compulsion, and who rely largely on universal services. New duties on public bodies brought in under the Children and Young People Act should help, but it is only with the full commitment of those working with our children and young people that we can hope for real change.

The issues with children being looked after at home are of long standing – ever since the establishment of the system in 1971 there have been questions about its status as an effective intervention. But the time has now come to
There are challenges in the CELCIS reports for social work, concerning their use of this disposal, and the level of priority and support they give to children and families subject to Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’. There are challenges in these reports for the Children’s Hearings system, which needs to assess the purpose of these orders, and what its role is in ensuring compulsory supervision at home actually delivers positive change for a child. But there are also challenges for the Scottish Government and Scottish society, linked to fundamental questions about how much we are willing to do for vulnerable children and their families. We hope this Barnardo’s Scotland report, accompanied by the three CELCIS research reports, will help to open up a debate about the needs of children looked after at home, and about the efficacy of the current looked after at home system.

**Martin Crewe**  
Director, Barnardo’s Scotland
Children and young people ‘looked after at home’ are subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) with no condition of residence (or, in some cases, a requirement to live with a parent). This is a type of legal supervision order, unique to the Scottish system of child welfare and protection. Children who are subject to these orders are considered to be ‘looked after’ by a local authority, but continue to live at home with a parent or another person with parental responsibility for the child. A social worker is allocated to the child, in order to ensure that the terms of the order are met. These kinds of orders (sometimes referred to, prior to legislative changes in 2011, as ‘Home Supervision Requirements’) have been in use since the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and, since the inception of the Children’s Hearing system in 1971, they have been one of the most commonly used disposals.

Barnardo’s Scotland has commissioned the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS) to produce a series of reports exploring what kind of intervention ‘looked after at home’ represents in Scotland today. They consider what support children looked after at home receive and how this corresponds to their needs. Two key issues arise from the CELCIS reports.

Firstly, despite being one of the most commonly used interventions for vulnerable children, very little research has been done to understand the needs of the children concerned. From the limited information available, outcomes for these children appear to be poorer than for looked after children in other care placements.

Secondly, the evidence we do have, drawn from both the available research and practice experience, suggests that while the needs of this group may often be different from those of children who are accommodated by a local authority, the level of support they require can often be similar. However, children looked after at home can be seen by professionals as a group whom the state has less duty to support than other looked after children, and who therefore require only relatively light touch intervention. This means they do not always have equal access to services and support made available to other looked after children. For example, in many local areas specialist nursing support is made available to children who are looked after and accommodated, but not to children looked after at home.

For some children, being looked after at home is the right option, and it is true that some children do get the services and support they need. However, on the basis of the evidence outlined in the CELCIS reports it appears a large number of children may be looked after at home because attempts at working with families on a voluntary basis have failed, but there is not yet sufficient evidence to remove a child from their parents (or family member). No doubt the social workers and Children’s Hearing will be concerned about the impact of removing a child from their family environment, school and community, and will consider all options before taking the drastic step of accommodating a child. But in the current financial climate it is legitimate to question whether concerns about the
costs and resource implications of accommodation (which is considerably more expensive than leaving a child living at home) play into the recommendations being presented to the Hearing.

While the evidence does suggest that a number of children on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ achieve positive outcomes, in the absence of data and research we cannot be certain that the intervention of being looked after at home actually contributed to their success. The only thing we do know for sure is that, although children looked after at home are in no way a homogenous group, on average outcomes are poorer than they are for other looked after children. That knowledge alone should motivate everyone involved in the system to investigate the issue further.

Barnardo’s Scotland believes that in many circumstances early intervention, and effectively supporting and addressing the needs of children and young people when they are living at home, is preferable to accommodating children. However, it is our conclusion that, in practice, the intensive support which the child needs may only be made available once they are accommodated. This undermines the potential of looked after at home status to be a powerful tool in preventing children and families from reaching levels of even greater crisis.

Therefore Barnardo’s Scotland makes five key recommendations to improve the support available for children looked after at home:

1. **Honesty and candour**

There needs to be a recognition, from both local and national government, that the current system of Compulsory Supervision Orders (without a condition of residence), does not appear to deliver improvements in the lives of many vulnerable children. The reality is that the outcomes for this group, in key indicators such as educational outcomes, remain stubbornly below those achieved for other groups of looked after children. On the basis of the evidence available, this kind of intervention does not appear to lead to the comprehensive and consistent delivery of intensive family support, or other focused interventions, which are needed to address the root causes of the issues which led to the decision to impose compulsory measures. Children who are looked after at home should always receive the services and support they need to address the issues which led to their involvement in the Children’s Hearing system, and which the Hearing expects to be delivered when it takes its decision. If this kind of order cannot, in practice, guarantee this kind of intervention for many children, we must open up an informed discussion about the purpose and use of Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ within Scotland’s system of protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children.
2. **Principle**

To accompany the above recommendation, children and young people on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ need to be recognised as having levels of need which may be on a par with other looked after children, even if these needs can be distinct. Looked after at home must never be seen as automatically being a relatively light touch or low-cost placement, and the responsibilities of all corporate parents (in terms of safeguarding and promoting wellbeing) should be clearly understood as identical for all looked after children, regardless of placement type.

3. **Guidance**

Specific national guidance is required, detailing the Scottish Government’s expectations for how local authorities (and other corporate parents) should monitor and support children who are looked after at home. Guidance should also outline what types of support should be made available to children and their families, on the basis of what available evidence suggests works to improve wellbeing and outcomes. This guidance should support social work teams to make sure the right decisions are taken and the right support allocated.

4. **Services**

Some local authorities, often working with voluntary organisations such as Includem and Barnardo’s Scotland, already have good models of working with children on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’. Such models need to be more widely disseminated and become the norm.

5. **Learning and development**

To help overcome ingrained attitudes around the support required by children who are looked after at home, those involved in providing services to looked after children should be supported with appropriate learning materials. This should help ensure widespread understanding of the principle of equal treatment and entitlement.
Introducilion

Children and young people ‘looked after at home’ currently represent over a quarter of Scotland’s ‘looked after’ population. The families involved often experience multiple, chronic problems such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues and financial difficulties. Yet despite the prevalence of ‘looked after at home’ as an intervention, and the seriousness of the challenges, very little is actually known about the needs1 of the children and families involved, or whether it actually works to improve a child or young person’s situation. In short, while this population of children and young people may be overseen by the state, their needs are often overlooked.

The research study commissioned by Barnardo’s Scotland is an attempt to begin redressing that oversight. Carried out by the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland (CELCIS), the study synthesises the existing research, and builds on it with a new analysis of the needs of children and young people looked after at home, and of the services available to them in Scotland.

The study consists of three reports:

(1) Reviewing the literature
(2) Identifying needs and outcomes
(3) Exploring service provision

Together these three reports explore children and young people’s experience of ‘being looked after at home with the aim of determining: (a) how (if it all) this group differs from their peers who are looked after and accommodated; (b) identifying the factors which may contribute to differences in outcomes; and (c) models of practice which effectively support children and their families. In doing so we hope to stimulate an overdue public debate about Scotland’s strategy for improving the lives of children and young people who are ‘looked after at home’.

Context

Since the foundation of Scotland’s Children’s Hearings system, the ‘home supervision’ requirement has been panel members most commonly used disposal. Referred to as ‘looked after at home’, this Compulsory Supervision Order is designed to secure positive change in a child’s life through the guarantee of relevant state support and compliance of child and family. ‘Looked after at home’ status is now applied in response to a wide range of circumstances faced by children and young people, such as persistent non-attendance at school and anti-social or criminal behaviour.

1 ‘Needs’ are conceived here as the barriers which prevent or restrict wellbeing and achievement of potential. Needs should not be seen in isolation; they are inter-related (e.g. health impacts on education just as education impacts on health).
Table 1 Number of children looked after by type of accommodation 2010-2014 (from Children’s Social Work Statistics Scotland, 2013-14 http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/4375/2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Accommodation</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At home with parents</td>
<td>6,193</td>
<td>5,476</td>
<td>5,153</td>
<td>4,762</td>
<td>4,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends/relatives</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>3,910</td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>4,183</td>
<td>4,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Foster Carers provided by LA</td>
<td>3,651</td>
<td>3,871</td>
<td>3,946</td>
<td>3,906</td>
<td>4,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Foster Carers purchased by LA</td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>1,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With prospective adopters</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In other community</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In local authority home</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In voluntary home</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In residential school</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In secure accommodation</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis care</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In other residential</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total looked after children</td>
<td>15,892</td>
<td>16,231</td>
<td>16,248</td>
<td>16,032</td>
<td>15,580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In July 2014 this group of children and young people represented over a quarter (4,144 children) of Scotland’s ‘looked after’ population. Having previously risen in line with the overall increase in the total looked after population, the number of children looked after at home has fallen significantly since 2012. However, they still constitute a very significant proportion of children looked after in Scotland.

Significantly there appears to be a lack of hard evidence about why there has been such a change in the data. This is just one example of the wider lack of information about this care disposal. As is clear from the CELCIS reports, only limited research and inquiry has been undertaken into the needs of children looked after at home.

However, the available evidence strongly suggests that many children, young people and families are not receiving the services and support they need.
to improve their outcomes and wellbeing. Official statistics regularly draw attention to the fact that ‘looked after at home’ pupils fare worst (in terms of school attendance or attainment) than any other group of looked after children. Across the sector professionals concede that the needs of these children are often on a par with those who are looked after away from home.

Figure 1: Average Educational Attainment tariff scores of looked after children who spent the whole of the academic year in a single placement and who left school during that year, by the accommodation type of that placement 2011/12 and 2012/13 (from http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00459479.pdf)

Barnardo’s Scotland provides a range of services to children and young people who are currently or were formerly looked after at home. Through these services we are aware of the serious vulnerabilities of this population, and that, in practice, Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ are not always adequately addressing them. The principle of being looked after at home is a good one, but it must be used in appropriate circumstances, and the level of support available for the looked after child must be appropriate to their needs. Reform and improvement of the system is necessary, based on an understanding of the needs of the population, and a commitment to investing in services which secure and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. We hope this study, summarised in the pages below, can contribute to that process of reform and improvement.
Report 1

Reviewing the literature

Research literature directly focused on children on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ in Scotland is very limited. Only four research studies including original work concentrating on children looked after at home were identified. Therefore the literature review had to use a two-tiered approach to identify relevant wider material. Sources were identified through electronic searches and requests for recommendations from subject experts. Documents were then screened according to a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria (set out in the full report).

However, taken together, this limited literature suggests that despite their theoretically equivalent status in policy, ‘looked after at home’ are a marginalised group in the Scottish care system. This marginalisation is illustrated by the lack of research related to their experience, but also demonstrated in a couple of other important ways.

First, marginalisation is evidenced in the system’s tendency to downgrade the needs of the children and families involved. What literature exists suggests that many professionals can view young people ‘looked after at home’ as automatically having less urgent needs than those looked after children who have been accommodated, resulting in fewer services being made available to them. Obviously children who are removed from home to become looked after and accommodated will often have more urgent needs (otherwise they would not have been removed), but this presumption can mean the particular needs of those children looked after at home are overlooked. Mandated social work visits do not take place (Murray 2002) and statutory care plans are sometimes seen as optional (Murray 2002 & Gadda 2012). Files examined in the course of one study found that little attention was given to monitoring the children’s development. Moreover, because social workers sometimes found parents difficult to engage with and effectively challenge, children were exposed to further abuse and neglect (Broadhurst & Pendleton 2007).

Therefore, a number of authors have concluded that children and young people at home have support needs which can be at least as significant as those of accommodated looked after children, and in some cases, even more significant. These children are especially vulnerable, as a result of being less visible, less supported and less knowledgeable of their rights. Young people have reported that they do not fully understand the purpose of their home supervision, and are not engaged in planning or decision making (CELCIS 2012). This population was also found to be the least likely (among looked after children) to have access to a computer or books, and potentially subject to negative parental attitudes towards education.

The lack of effective action, in practice, to address many of these children’s needs is explained by many authors as the product of fiscal constraints. In a context of limited resources professionals will always have to make decisions as to how to allocate and prioritise services, and as such it is unsurprising that greater attention is focused on accommodated children, where the processes
are better understood, the purposes of intervention are seen to be clearer and the resource implications more immediate and difficult to ignore. Participants in various studies have acknowledged that decisions about who would be eligible for services are often made on local interpretations of legislation and duty, driven by resource considerations (CELCIS, 2012). In this way young people looked after at home are effectively unable to access services to which they have a right.

This highlights the wider question of why this kind of order has continued to have high levels of use (even given the decline in recent years) given its effectiveness for many children and young people is questionable or at the very least uncreative. In Murray’s 2002 study, found that, judged purely on the basis that a Children's Hearing eventually decided the need for the supervision order had ended, home supervision could be seen as having positive results. But exploring the issue more than a decade later, Henderson’s study (2014) throws even that, very limited, success criterion into question. Of the 2,805 children sampled, whose first supervision requirement was ‘at home’, 30% (870) were still on a supervision requirement 45 months (3.7 years) later, with over half of that number (466) still on home supervision.

Part of the explanation for this may be that Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ tends to be used for older children (Henderson 2014). Studies included in the review consistently identified the importance of ‘age at entry to care’ in determining outcomes, with older children faring worse. Some authors conclude that ill-conceived attempts to keep children at home actually increase the risk of serious harm (Forrester et al. 2009), and research does suggest that if action is taken early in the child’s life to provide a degree of permanency, removing them from unstable family environments can have a beneficial effect (in the long term) on their childhood outcomes. But removing a child from its birth parents will always be a last resort, and other studies included in the review suggest that the focus should be on ensuring more (and better) work is done with families when problems first emerge (Wigley et al., 2012). Nearly half of young people involved in an Ofsted study (in England) felt that they would not have needed to come into care if more and earlier support had been provided to their birth families (OFSTED, 2011, p. 6). Another recent English study (OFSTED 2014) compared families who received an intensive support service with those who received services as usual. It found that sometime later (after an average period of 5.6 years) there were significant differences in parent and family outcomes between the two groups, with reduced substance misuse, reduced numbers in care and better family cohesiveness evident among those who received the intensive support.

Some authors have argued that the current emphasis on tangible outcomes (including educational attainment) risks narrowing what can be seen as success, and focuses intervention away from other important areas (McMurray,
Connolly, Preston-Shoot, & Wigley, 2011). It may be unhelpful, therefore, for interventions to be focused solely on the child. Parts of the literature suggest that holistic (and potentially long-term work) is required with families from an early stage (in the child’s life), which acknowledges and supports the relationship between parent and child. Writing 12 years ago McGhee and Waterhouse (2002) conclude that home supervision was originally conceived to support just this kind of work, but that over time it had become a means of securing support for families in more serious need. They attribute this to rising levels of need and resource restrictions.

In conclusion, some evidence suggests that Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ can be, if part of a long term package of family support, a positive intervention for some young people. However, evidence suggests that in practice there can be little effect, and that it can be an inappropriate and inadequate response to the child and family’s needs. The literature review identified calls for change, but also the reason why reform has been slow; principally the cost and complexity of addressing the identified need. There also remain significant gaps in the literature about what types of service and support actually improve these children and young people’s daily experiences and short-term and long-term outcomes.
Children ‘looked after at home’ are not a homogenous group, and existing research has rarely explored the differences between groups of children on, for example, the basis of age, referral grounds and location. In this report the researchers from CELCIS set out to investigate two questions: (1) in what way do outcomes for children and young people looked after at home (or previously at home) differ from their looked after and accommodated peers; and (2) whether there were any unique factors (age, referral grounds, etc.) which may contribute to the overall profile of outcomes. A mixed methods approach was used, involving four methods for primary data collection: a provider survey, follow-up interviews, service (case) studies and young people’s conversations.

**Children and young people’s perspective**

Eight young people agreed to share their experiences in face-to-face interviews. The young people varied in age from thirteen to late teens and there were equal numbers of females and males. The discussions generally centred on their experiences of services; what they liked and disliked about the support they received, what additional needs they had, and the impact that services had on their lives.

The young people felt that a flexible, relaxed and less formal approach to service delivery made it easier to build trusting, respectful relationships. Similarly, young people emphasised that to achieve the outcomes they wanted, they needed to remain in control of their own service use.

> [...] not to pressure you intae daeing things... they were helpful, they said that like whatever I needed to do they’d help me tae dae it. (Young Person)

> I can just use it whenever I need it, it’s not like I have to use it, it’s not like I don’t have to use it. (Young person)

The ability to access support when it was needed was of particular relevance to older young people who had previously been on looked after at home; this flexible support helped them through practical transitions to adulthood, in areas such as housing, finances and organising and attending interviews and appointments. This potentially requires a long-term commitment from services and young people suggested that they needed to be able to return to services on an ongoing basis as they understood that they would need support in these areas of their lives for some time to come.

Young people also spoke about their need to be able to decide who they would work with and when this would take place. One young person spoke about her discomfort with the large number of professionals involved in her life, particularly as she valued the relationship she had with the support worker at school.

**Service provider and practitioner’s perspective**

In total there were 88 participants in this section of the study, with a good balance between front-line workers, service co-ordinators and staff in
management roles. Responses were also received from a limited number Heads or Directors of services. Seven participants took part in semi-structured interviews.

All participants indicated that children and young people currently or previously on ‘looked after at home’ have substantial needs and face numerous issues. They stressed that each child and family had distinct characteristics and challenges that needed to be understood in order to frame appropriate responses for them, and that services needed to be able to help young people develop necessary skills to compensate for any deficit in their parents’ skills. Finding tailored ways of engaging children, young people and families was considered critical, with consistent and stable relationships between professionals, child and family central to success, preferably with as few organisations involved as possible.

[We need services which] maintain them as a happy individual child, and support them in a safe environment, build their resilience to cope with living perhaps with a less functional parent or home life, providing again that it’s not damaging or [they are] in any danger (Service provider).

Participants were particularly anxious that accessing mental health support and services was especially problematic for young people on looked after at home. Findings suggest that a disproportionate number of young people currently or previously looked after at home experienced substantial mental health problems including anxiety, self-harm and eating disorders. Mental health issues were attributed to early and on-going disadvantages, traumas and difficulties with forming secure attachments.

Self-harm is one manifestation of this – presenting as a big issue for this group of young people, but not generating a mental health diagnosis (Service provider). Concern was expressed by study participants related to the thresholds applied by mental health services, with the suggestion that often children and young people who are looked after at home experience a cluster of different mental health challenges, but often do not meet the clinical criteria for a particular condition. However concern was noted about the general shortage of services, and that some children and young people were effectively excluded due to chaotic lives, and the particular difficulties and barriers faced.

Wider mental wellbeing issues were frequently raised by study participants. Often these related to low self-esteem, confidence or resilience, leaving this group particularly susceptible to peer pressures. It was also felt that this group of children were at particular risk of missing out on routine health promotion and preventive health care, such as that obtained at school or through attendance at health appointments.

Non-attendance at school and poor access to training and further education were frequently highlighted as problematic areas. Participants were also concerned about the suitability, quality and quantity of alternate provision and
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Educational attainment. The continued and expanded use of activity agreements for young people at home was put forward as a useful way to encourage young people to engage in training, education or employment activities, and to maximise their income.

[...] accommodated children and young people are ‘that’s mine and I’m entitled to it and I’m going to get it’. Whereas looked after at home... I think some were in the dark about it, some of them weren't aware that they had this entitlement (Service provider).

Participants also told the researchers that some young people who had been involved with the social care system for lengthy periods of time had ‘become immune’ to what might be seen as the ‘threat’ of Children’s Hearings, and the possibility of being removed from home. This was often portrayed as part of a pattern of challenges or problematic behaviours which could make it more difficult to work with some young people. Some participants felt rationales for decision making (about whether a child was accommodated or kept at home) appeared unclear.

Participants spoke about family environments in which parents are unable to provide appropriate role models, boundaries or care for their children. Many parents were seen as having considerable needs of their own, requiring considerable support and encouragement. Participants suggested that parents differed in the extent to which they were able or willing to take responsibility for their children, with some parents appearing to expect the local authority to provide care for their children, including, in some cases, by removing children and looking after them away from home.

A unique need of a young person who is looked after at home is the lack of appropriate parenting (Service provider).

The research suggests that work with parents around their own lifestyles and parenting capacity is seen as essential by most service providers, and that successful work with parents was critical to improving the child or young person’s situation at home. Participants suggested ‘entrenched’ parents may be more likely to engage in positive ways with non-statutory providers, and in particular, third sector providers told the researchers that parents reported a preference for using their services for support and advice rather than contacting statutory agencies (such as social work or the police).

Conclusions

Children and young people looked after at home undoubtedly have substantial, complex needs. Many of these needs are associated with their early and on-going experiences of abuse, neglect, deprivation and exposure to various risks and adversities. Indeed some adversities (lack of stability at home, fear of removal, etc.) may actually be compounded by what families may see as the implicit threat of being looked after at home, which is that it is a precursor
to the child being removed. However, the children’s needs are complex, multi-
ufactored and fluid; over time their situation and circumstances will change and
the supports provided to them may alter. Furthermore, needs are different for
different individuals and subgroups (e.g. older children and young people had
different needs from younger children).

The findings of this study suggest that, as a whole, children looked after at
home are likely to experience higher levels of need than the general population
and that many will have needs which are equivalent to, and in some respects
greater than, children looked after away from home. However, the study
finds evidence that the support many children and young people ’looked
after at home’ receive is sub-optimal. It is frequently inadequately planned or
sporadically delivered leaving many needs unaddressed. Delivering services to
children ’looked after at home’ and their families requires providers to develop
and adopt a range of additional and different strategies from those used to work
with other groups of children and young people, but in the context of fiscal
constraint some providers perceive this particular group as less in need or
less entitled. This is rationalised by some as being due to a categorical ’duty’ to
allocate resource to those currently or formerly looked after away from home,
whereas they portray their duty towards those currently or formerly ’looked
after at home’ as being somewhat contingent. As a result systems, support and
services are developed and delivered in ways which marginalise children and
young people looked after at home such that whilst they are officially overseen
many of their needs may be overlooked.

Participants in this study repeatedly asserted that in order to access support
children and young people needed to develop trusting relationships with
workers who would ideally be available to them over time. Furthermore, young
people themselves emphasised that they needed someone to be there for them,
when they were ready, on their own terms. Therefore a first aim for services
working with children ’looked after at home’ must be to create an environment
that promotes a positive sense of stability and permanence within the family.
CELCIS’s findings suggest that where one service has been successful in
providing or facilitating a sense of relational and emotional permanence,
this service may be well-placed to act as a bridgehead through which other
support and services can be more effectively delivered. Equally, if stability can
be improved in the home, parents may be better placed to support the child
or young person to positively access and benefit from necessary services and
support. In this way the provision of a greater sense of relational permanence
for the child or young person is a pre-requisite for meeting other needs.
Report 3
Exploring service provision

This final CELCIS report presents findings related to the capacity and type of services available to children and young people currently, or previously, on looked after at home. The document includes information from different strands of the study, including the survey, interviews and service case studies.

Within the limitations of this study it was not possible to identify every service available to children and young people ‘looked after at home’ in Scotland, but considering the number and range of participants involved in the study, its findings are a fair reflection of the current situation.

The study identified providers who offered a range of services to children and young people looked after at home. This included providers from different sectors and those delivering different types of service. Services differed from each other in many ways, for example, in the size of the service, the geography addressed, the ages served and the groups of children and young people targeted. There was considerable diversity in the aims of the service in terms of the outcome areas they addressed. As might be expected for this group of children, the greatest number of services included those providing education and those providing social care.

Not all providers were able to identify which of their service users were children currently or previously looked after at home. In general terms, we found that those services delivered via referral and those more concerned with safeguarding were the most likely to be aware of children’s looked after status.

Despite the many differences between services, there were also common themes; in particular, most services were not focused exclusively or even predominantly on serving children or young people currently or previously looked after at home. Consequently, services were not designed specifically to address the needs of this group; instead many providers would regard themselves as responding to individual need. This may be surprising as it is well-documented that this group has particularly poor outcomes and may face particular circumstances and barriers that may make them less likely or able to use other services.

Many services reported challenges in working with or engaging children and young people currently or previously looked after at home. Some described approaches they found helpful, including carefully identifying underlying problems, building positive and sustained relationships and involving and supporting family members. Others suggested that improvement is needed to the way that information is shared between providers, in intervening earlier and in allocating resources effectively and equitably.

The study identified 18 services which may be available to pre-school ‘looked after at home’ children (10 of these available from birth). A further 18 services were aimed specifically towards children aged 12 or above. Around half the
services (32 of the 62) identified in the study were only provided in one local authority area. Many of these services were relatively small - 69% of participants in the survey (n=88) indicated that over the past year their services had worked with fewer than 40 children currently or previously looked after at home.

Specific findings from the study include:

- 53 of the services were only available to children and young people currently looked after at home. 58 were available to both children looked after at home and those who had been previously looked after at home.

- Approximately two-thirds of services (43 participants from 39 organisations) were able to provide figures or estimates of the proportion of children and young people who were currently or previously looked after at home who use their services annually.

The report suggests that a number of factors come together to reduce the chances of any individual child or young person on ‘looked after at home’ having a positive experience of support. These are summarised under three themes: first, needs and circumstances compound the barriers which make it difficult to access services which would benefit them; second, services may simply not be available or may not be relevant or suited to the child or young person’s needs; third, a different ‘set’ of services is available to children and young people ‘looked after at home’ in different areas. These factors in combination mean that children and young people looked after at home may have access to very few services, even where they do, may not be keen to use them. In addition they may not know if they are eligible, understand how to access them or have the confidence to do so. Finally they may face practical or financial issues that make it difficult to maintain contact with the service.

Conclusions

The study reveals worrying examples of a tacit acceptance that the care system often only offers relatively ‘light touch’ interventions to those who are looked after at home, with progressively more resources and support offered to those who are accommodated elsewhere. The situation described by participants suggests that there is a feeling that these children and young people cannot currently be effectively supported with the current resource constraints of the system.

Looked after at home is a unique intervention; it exists to support children and young people in great need and could provide an ideal opportunity to support them and their families. Indeed, the findings of this and other studies show that when services are successfully delivered to these young people, their experiences and outcomes can be improved. However, it is clear that suitable services are often not successfully made available, such that despite their status as looked after children, these children and young people often receive less attention and support than other looked after children, even when levels of identifiable need are similar.
Similar concerns have been raised before and participants in this study refer to a general recognition that more needs to be done to support these children. However, it seems that some providers hesitate to be more explicit about the limits of the support they can provide or more vocal about the resource implications of doing more.

The report concludes that realising the unique opportunities provided Compulsory Supervision orders ‘at home’ would require a significant programme of multi-level and sustained change. This would need to be underpinned by political will, a willingness to revisit how, when and for whom Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ is best used and a clear re-stating of the principle of parity of entitlement based on needs. It is likely that investment and additional staffing would be necessary alongside substantial shifts in service approach and design.
Barnardo’s reflections and action points

Taken together, the CELCIS reports paint a concerning picture of the support we give young people looked after at home. CELCIS estimates that there could be around 35,000 children and young people in Scotland, between the ages of 0 and 21, who could be described as currently or previously looked after at home (but never looked after away from home).

The reports make clear Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ can be, if part of a long-term package of family support, a positive intervention for some young people. But the available evidence also suggests that, in practice, placing a child or young person on a Compulsory Supervision Order ‘at home’ can have little effect, representing an inadequate response to the child’s and the family’s needs.

As Report 2 highlights, the support many children and young people looked after at home receive can often be limited. It can be poorly planned or sporadically delivered, leaving many needs unaddressed. Delivering services to children looked after at home and their families requires providers to develop and adopt a range of different strategies from those used with other groups of looked after children and young people. However, while the support required is different, it does not mean that children and young people on this kind of order automatically merit a lower level of support.

Especially in the context of budgetary constraints, some providers may perceive this particular group as less in need or less entitled. This appears to be rationalised by some as being due to a categorical ‘duty’ to allocate resources to those currently or formerly looked after away from home, whereas they feel their responsibility towards those currently or formerly looked after at home as a secondary consideration. While clearly this is not always the case, and there are some good models of practice, all too often systems, support and services are developed and delivered in ways which can marginalise children and young people looked after at home. There can be a tacit acceptance that the care system offers relatively ‘light touch’ interventions to those who are looked after at home, with progressively more resources and support offered to those who are accommodated elsewhere. While they are officially overseen by the state, many of their needs may be overlooked.

Therefore a first aim for services working with children looked after at home must be to create an environment that promotes a positive sense of stability and permanence within the family. As previously highlighted, CELCIS’s findings suggest that where one service has been successful in providing or facilitating a sense of relational and emotional permanence, this service may be well-placed to act as a bridgehead through which other support and services can be more effectively delivered. Equally, if stability can be improved in the home, parents may be better placed to support the child or young person to positively access and benefit from necessary services and support. In this way the provision of a greater sense of relational permanence for the child or young person is a prerequisite for meeting other needs.
So what are the barriers to ensuring that young people looked after at home get this kind of support? Report 3 summarises these through three themes: first, the complexity of the different needs and circumstances of this very varied group; second, services may simply not be available or may not be relevant or suited to the child or young person’s needs; third, a different ‘set’ of services is available to children and young people looked after at home in different areas. These factors in combination mean that children and young people looked after at home may have access to relatively few services, and even where they do, may not be keen to use them. In addition, they may not know if they are eligible, understand how to access services or have the confidence to do so. Finally, they may face practical or financial issues which make it difficult to maintain contact with a service.

The evidence from this study suggests that there is a substantial mismatch between the scale of need and the overall support available. Some participants highlighted the fact that existing services would be unable to meet all the needs of children and young people currently and previously looked after at home.

Feedback from Barnardo’s staff who work directly with these young people back up the message in the CELCIS reports, that there are systemic and operational issues in relation to Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ which could be improved and strengthened. Our staff highlighted the need to make better assessments about the issues presented and the supports required. They feel there should be clearer planning and feedback processes regarding the implementation of interventions and supports, and overall more consistency in decision-making processes. Improvements in communication between, and co-ordination of, the different support services would help plans to be implemented in a more coherent way, and earlier, more robust and targeted interventions could help prevent the unnecessary escalation of issues.

In the experience of our staff there also needs to be greater focus on longer term, co-operative planning for transitions and in particular the transference or withdrawal of support e.g. the move from care to aftercare. This should be part of a greater recognition of the importance that effective relationships play in engaging with these young people, which can help redress the deficit of family/parental supports in areas such as encouragement, confidence-building and role modelling.

Getting a clearer picture of what is happening in relation to these young people is also important and this would be supported by more standardised monitoring and reporting so that the services offered/utilised by this group can be better assessed and measured. Our staff also suggest that there should be an exploration of the time limits and review process for Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’, and the need for more early reviews when there is a change in the child’s circumstances or evidence to suggest that intervention is proving ineffective. They feel that this might facilitate more discussion regarding the
effectiveness and purpose of the orders and therefore the value in continuing with them if their implementation is not working.

Therefore Barnardo’s Scotland makes five recommendations to improve the support available for children looked after at home:

1. **Honesty and candour**

   There needs to be a recognition, from both local and national government, that the current system of Compulsory Supervision Orders (without a condition of residence), is failing to deliver improvements in the lives of many vulnerable children. The reality is that the outcomes for this group, in key indicators such as educational outcomes, remain stubbornly below those achieved for other groups of looked after children. On the basis of the evidence available, this kind of intervention does not appear to lead to the comprehensive and consistent delivery of intensive family support, or other focused interventions, which are needed to address the root causes of the issues which led to the decision to impose compulsory measures. Children who are looked after at home should always receive the services and support they need to address the issues which led to their involvement in the Children’s Hearing system, and which the Hearing expects to be delivered when it takes its decision. If a Compulsory Supervision Order cannot, in practice, guarantee this kind of intervention for many children, we must open up an informed discussion about the purpose and use of Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ within Scotland’s system of protecting and promoting the wellbeing of children.

   **Action required:** All future Scottish Government publications relevant to looked after children (including guidance related to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014) should explicitly reference the needs of children looked after at home, and provide a clear statement of expectation about the purpose of this kind of intervention.
**Action required:** It is clear that even if a child becomes looked after at home because they would benefit from intensive family support or another focused intervention, they may still not get the support they need. The new statutory architecture for supporting children with identified wellbeing needs, including the named person and the Child’s Plan, together with the provision for edge of care support set out in Part 12 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, provide new opportunities for ensuring that intensive family support is delivered to the families that need it. While there are clearly benefits to compulsory orders in some situations – for example, engaging with families who would not engage on a voluntary basis, and a child becoming looked after will then enable them to secure a wider range of corporate parenting and aftercare support – the priority must be about ensuring the family gets the support it needs as early as possible. Therefore the Scottish Government should set out how it will ensure that children who need intensive family support will receive it, and how the new GIRFEC children’s planning process will integrate with Children’s Hearings to ensure this support is delivered, and is delivering positive results for the child and family, building on good work in individual local authorities.

**Action required:** Children’s Hearing panels need to have clear information about why social work are recommending the order, and what support will be provided while the child is on the order. Children who will not benefit directly from being looked after at home, or where the evidence is unclear, should not be placed on a Compulsory Supervision Order ‘at home’. This status should not become a ‘waiting room’, where all that happens is that the situation is monitored to see if a child needs to be accommodated at a later date. For some children, this will mean staying at home and receiving the support they need through a Child’s Plan and services available under Part 12 of the 2014 Act. For others, it will mean that they should be looked after and accommodated. While this will have potentially significant cost implications, the purpose of our system is to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children; if a part of our system does not function well, we must fix it, or live with the alternatives. Therefore Scottish Government, Children’s Hearings Scotland, SCRA, local authorities and Social Work Scotland should set out how they will work together through the Children’s Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) to ensure these orders are not used inappropriately, and how any resource implications of providing these children with effective, home-based interventions, through the Child’s Plan, or accommodating them earlier, could be met.
2. Principle

To accompany the above recommendation, children and young people on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’ need to be recognised as having levels of need which may be on a par with other looked after children, even if these needs can be distinct. Looked after at home must never be seen as automatically being a relatively light touch or low-cost placement, and the responsibilities of all corporate parents (in terms of safeguarding and promoting wellbeing) should be clearly understood as identical for all looked after children, regardless of placement type.

**Action required:** The Scottish Government must support corporate parents to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in respect of children and young people on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’. This may require further guidance and assistance, to enable organisations to work effectively with vulnerable children still living with their families.

**Action required:** Every local authority, working with Community Planning Partners, should publish a strategy for safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children and young people looked after at home, as part of the statutory Children’s Services Plan under section 16 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act. This must be based on a thorough assessment of the population’s varied needs, built on an effective feedback loop from Child’s Plans, and should form part of Care Inspectorate scrutiny.

3. Guidance

Specific national guidance is required, detailing the Scottish Government’s expectations for how local authorities (and other corporate parents) should monitor and support children who are looked after at home. Guidance should also outline what types of support should be made available to children and their families, on the basis of what available evidence suggests works to improve wellbeing and outcomes. This guidance should support social work teams to make sure the right decisions are taken and the right support allocated.

**Action required:** Alongside the partners in the CHIP group, the Scottish Government should work with Children’s Hearings Scotland to ensure hearings can effectively assess the recommendations and measures proposed for a Compulsory Supervision Order ‘at home’ to ensure effective oversight of the child.
**Action required:** The Scottish Government should publish detailed guidance to enable community planning partners and corporate parents more widely to understand their roles and responsibilities in respect to children and young people on Compulsory Supervision Orders 'at home'.

**Action required:** Regulations covering the support needs of children looked after at home need to ensure orders are not allowed to continue with no positive change. There should always be a clear Child's Plan which is reviewed regularly, and, if improvements are not seen, alternative measures should be put in place.

### 4. Services

Some local authorities, often working with voluntary organisations such as Includem and Barnardo’s Scotland, already have good models of working with children on Compulsory Supervision Orders ‘at home’. Such models need to be more widely disseminated and become the norm.

**Action required:** The Scottish Government, with assistance from the Care Inspectorate and CELCIS, should identify examples of effective practice with respect to children and young people looked after at home and make this available to all Community Planning Partnerships.

### 5. Learning and development

To help overcome ingrained attitudes around the support required by children who are looked after at home, those involved in providing services to looked after children should be supported with appropriate learning materials. This should help ensure widespread understanding of the principle of equal treatment and entitlement.

**Action required:** The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), the Care Inspectorate and Children’s Hearings Scotland, should review knowledge and understanding of professionals and panel members with respect to the needs and entitlements of children looked after at home.
Bibliography and references

Material drawn from three reports produced by the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland at Strathclyde University for Barnardo’s Scotland.

Overseen but often overlooked: Children and young people ‘looked after at home’ in Scotland

Report 1: Reviewing the literature

Report 2: Identifying needs and outcomes

Report 3: Exploring service provision

Specific references


Overseen but often overlooked
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