

**Scottish Government Debate:  
Raising Attainment and Ambition for all Scotland's Young People**

Barnardo's believes that Scotland, as a corporate parent, is currently failing looked after children at home or in kinship care settings.

We recognise that good work has been carried out and outcomes for some looked after children, particularly those in stable foster care environments, have improved and this should be recognised and applauded.

However, those in and leaving care are more likely to leave education with little or no qualifications, are considerably more likely to be unemployed or come into contact with the criminal justice system, suffer poorer health, are more likely to be homeless and suffer from addictions including drugs and alcohol. Many have a multiple problems and cost the state considerably.

Some people regard looked after children and young people as a group who both have, and cause, problems. Barnardo's believes that it is not inevitable for looked after children to have poorer outcomes than other children in Scotland.

If Scotland is to raise the attainment and ambition for all Scotland's young people then it must, as a matter of urgency, do much more to improve the positive outcomes of all its looked after and accommodated children.

If the Scottish Government is serious about a modal shift towards early intervention and preventative services in order to save substantial money in the long term then it must make a serious investment in supporting looked after and accommodated children.

**Key Recommendations**

1. Minister for Children and Young People must report annually to Parliament on the overall condition of looked after children and care leavers in key areas of education, employment, health, housing and criminal justice.
2. The Scottish Government/Local Authorities must gather comprehensive data covering all areas of concern for looked after and accommodated children and care leavers. There are significant gaps in the data and analysis at present. This data should be published annually.
3. An early intervention and preventative approach must be at the heart of all policy and strategy devised in relation to looked after and accommodated children.
4. Ensure that the role of the state as a corporate parent is considered in the Government's proposed National Parenting Strategy with a view to the state

providing better quality care through stability and continuity, as well as specific assistance to overcome educational deficits.

5. The proposed National Parenting Strategy must support early intervention for families with children at risk of becoming looked after.
6. All looked after children at school must have a named teacher to support them. Named teachers must have clear connections with social workers and discuss attainment and ambition regularly. There needs to be better co-ordination between the education system and other services supporting looked after children.
7. More work needs to be done to raise awareness of the needs of looked after children in the education system and must be included in the teacher training curriculum.
8. Scottish Government and education institutions need to do more to support looked after children move into further and higher education, with educational, living and financial support, as well as directly working with those children in schools to help with the transition.
9. Recent work by Barnardo's has highlighted that the role of mentors in the life of looked after and accommodated children can improve their ambition. Mentoring support services should be made available to all looked after and accommodated children.
10. A mental health assessment, assessing mental and emotional health needs, should be given to all looked after and accommodated children as recommended by the Scottish Government in CEL 16<sup>1</sup>. Assessments must be followed up with fast tracked CAMH services as appropriate.
11. Government must ensure that all those looked after and accommodated children who leave care have a pathway plan and pathway co-ordinator.

## **Key Facts**

### General

- In 2010 there were 15,892 children looked after by local authorities, an increase of 4 per cent since 2009. The number of children looked after has increased every year since 2001, and is at its highest since 1982. (Scottish Government)
- Over 4,000 young people leave care every year a figure, which is increasing year on year. Last year of the 4,504 children that left care 3,918 were eligible for aftercare services.

### Education

- Looked after children attainment level in schools is five and half times lower when compared to all school children.
- Yet those looked after children placed in stable foster homes when compared to all school children out performed them.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2009\\_16.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2009_16.pdf)

- Ninety percent of looked after children left school aged 16 years or under, compared to only 37 percent of all school leavers.
- Looked after children are over eight times more likely to be excluded from school than other children.
- Fifty-nine per cent of looked after children who left school last year went into employment, education or training, compared with 87 percent of all school leavers.
- Six months later that figure dropped to only 44 percent of looked after children compared with 85 percent of all school leavers.
- One per cent of looked after children went on to higher education, compared to 36 percent of all school leavers.

### Employment

- Six months after leaving school 54 percent of looked after children were unemployed compared to 12 percent of all school leavers.
- Of the 3,918 young people eligible for aftercare services last year only 37 percent who had a known economic activity were in education, training or employment.
- Only 51 percent of young people leaving care (of the school leaving age) had a pathway plan on the date they were discharged, and 69 percent had a pathway coordinator.

### Criminal Justice

- Forty percent of young offenders currently in HMP Polmont are care leavers (SPS). Department of Health research (1999) found that 23 percent of adult prisoners and 38 percent of young prisoners are care leavers.
- Three quarters of children who are in residential care by their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday will have a criminal conviction by the age of 22.

### Housing

- Thirty percent of homeless people in the UK have been in the care system<sup>2</sup>.

### Health

- Sixty seven percent of care leavers aged 16-24 were found to smoke regularly, compared to 28 percent of all 16-24 year olds<sup>3</sup>.
- There is a significant uptake of drugs by young people who have been looked after compared with other teenagers. Around a third (31 percent) have first tried drugs while in care, but just over two-thirds had taken drugs before coming into care<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The Who Cares? Trust

<sup>3</sup> Young adult smokers in Scotland, ScotPho, (2009)

<sup>4</sup> The health of looked after and accommodated children and young people, Social Work Inspection Agency (2006)

- Looked after and accommodated children in Scotland aged 11 to 17 were twice as likely to smoke, drink or take drugs compared to their English counterparts<sup>5</sup>.
- It is estimated that around 50 percent of looked after children have a mental health problem. Up to five times greater than all children<sup>6</sup>.
- Research at the University of Bedfordshire indicated that looked after children are more likely to be victims of child sexual exploitation.
- Young women who have been in care are more likely to become teenage parents than other young people.

### Fostering and adoption

- 218 children ceasing to be looked after during the year ending 31st July 2010 were adopted<sup>7</sup>
- 325 children were adopted by non-relatives during 2010
- 466 adoptions took place in 2010 (includes step-parent (27.5%), grandparent(s) (1.1%), other relation(s) (1.7%) and no relation (69.7%) adoptions)

### **About looked after and accommodated children**

Children become looked after for a variety of reasons. These can include concerns about the child's wellbeing and risk from poor parenting, abuse, neglect and parental substance misuse. A small number of children are looked after because they have committed offences.

Looked after children are not a homogenous group. The term 'looked after' includes children who are subject to supervision and live with family members as well as children who live with foster carers or in residential schools or care homes. They can move between these groups, some children will experience numerous moves and foster placements.

### At a disadvantage

A research review of young people leaving care carried out by the Social Policy Research Unit highlighted evidence that shows that the level of outcome for these young people generally reflected the quality of care they experience, their transitions from care and the support they receive after care<sup>8</sup>.

### Quality of care

Looked after children in stable foster homes achieved far better educational outcomes than other looked after children and their peers, scoring higher than the average for all children. Of the one percent of looked after children who went into

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> The health of looked after and accommodated children and young people in Scotland messages from research, Jane Scott and Malcolm Hill, Social Work Inspection Agency (2006)

<sup>7</sup> Registrar General for Scotland (2010)

<sup>8</sup> Research Review: Young People leaving care, Social Policy Research Unit (2006)

higher education research has shown that those that do are more likely to have had stable care experiences, continuity in schooling and were assisted by foster carers<sup>9</sup>.

### Put out to fail?

The vast majority of research suggests that the majority of care leavers move to independent living between the ages of 16-18, which is far younger than children living at home who remain at home well into their 20s. Care leavers are forced to make the transition to complete independent adulthood far younger than the peers and often from chaotic and vulnerable backgrounds.

In modern Britain research is showing that family support for young people, including financial, practical and emotional, is on the increase. Those leaving care often do not have access to this level of support.

As a society we are expecting those leaving care to make a quick transition to independent adulthood without the support networks or life skills to cope.

### High dependency group

Scottish and international evidence shows that the vast majority of care leavers go onto become high dependency individuals at great cost to the tax payer. They require state support with income, accommodation, personal assistance and health. In some instances they become frequently involved in the criminal justice system, spending periods incarcerated. They often experience a cluster of problems both during care and after care guaranteeing their needs are multiple and complicated.

### Services and support

Evidence has shown that leaving care services can assist young people in making the transition from care to adulthood. Support with life skills, education and accommodation, as well as support with routes into employment can all have a positive impact.

Barnardo's Scotland currently runs a targeted programme to improve educational outcomes for looked after young people in Aberdeen

Strive\* is a 'booster programme' for children and young people aged between 11 years and 16 years who are 'looked after' at home or away from home and are struggling with mainstream school provision in terms of attainment, attendance and/or being at risk of exclusion.

The Programme begun in March 2011 and will run for 12 months, its aims are to:

1. Engage young people in learning and improve educational attainment.
2. Stem the flow of looked after school leavers entering negative destinations.
3. Champion a more holistic approach to the needs of looked after children amongst present and future frontline staff.

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<sup>9</sup> Jackson et al (2003), Ajayi & Quigley (2006)

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