

<i>item:</i>	5
<i>report:</i>	CYP03/10

## QUALITY ASSURANCE ON ALL AREAS OF SERVICE RELATING TO YOUNG CARE LEAVERS by Innis Mitchell & Sandie Young

### Summary

This report provides interim information on a comprehensive evaluation of services for children and young people who have been looked after in Highland. The study endeavoured to involve all current and former looked after young people in Highland aged between 16 years and 25 years. This is the first such study in Highland and is much more comprehensive than a more limited study undertaken nationally. The age group of the young people questioned meant that some left Council care several years ago, others in recent months.

Completed questionnaires were returned by 43 young people. Based on consent given by some of the young people a limited number of questionnaires were completed by professionals from agency records on the young person. Reported below is a selection of findings from the responses from young people. The attached appendices provide supporting information on the:

- Background to the study
- Methodology
- Statistics
- Quantitative data on those questions summarised in the report

Further analysis of the data is ongoing, to identify changes in experience over time and to seek to identify appropriate remedial actions where improvements in practice or process are indicated. This will also require further investigation and analysis to determine to what extent perceptions of experience are influenced by factors other than the experience itself. At this stage it would be inappropriate to draw any final conclusions from the raw data.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Integrated Children's Service Quality Assurance Group (ICSQAG) was established in 2008 to promote cross agency quality assurance work. An early task was to design and pilot a model for integrated quality assurance. It was agreed that the first full study would be a service evaluation of children and young people who had been *Looked After* in Highland. This was a significant and challenging commitment, as it involved a group who across the country are known to be very often disillusioned and disenchanted by formal services, and have often therefore largely disengaged from service providers.
- 1.2 The study was based on HMle guidance on evaluating services using quality assurance indicators. *Looked After* young people, statutory agencies and partner services, were asked relevant self-evaluation questions drawn together in a questionnaire format.
- 1.3 The questions were about the impact on young people of being *Looked After* and as they moved on to independence. These young people were asked for their views on the

accommodation and support services they received and other aspects which may have affected their ability to achieve their full potential.

- 1.4 Practitioners who were involved in the care of the young people were asked comparable questions. This aspect of the study will be reported on within the final report which will follow at a later date.

## 2. Initial findings from young people

- 2.1 Young people were asked if they felt that their views were taken into account and/or they were listened to by the specific services they had contact with.

Positive responses (Yes answers):

Health	80%
Social Work	70%
Education	64%
Barnardos	63%

*The majority of young people were mostly positive about every service they had contact with.*

- 2.2 Young people were also asked did those services discuss their situation with them as a Looked After child

Positive responses (Yes answers):

Health	56%
Social Work	91%
Education	43%
Police	24%
Barnardos	90%

*Social Work & Barnardos have a principal duty to discuss a young person's looked after situation and a high rating for both services would be expected. The lower scores for health and education may reflect other factors and will be further examined.*

- 2.3 Four general questions provided information on young people's views on the overall effectiveness of co-ordinated working by health, police, social work, education and Barnardos and the level of vulnerability felt by young people leaving care. Co-ordination and joint working have developed significantly in the last few years through a range of initiatives, and we will be examining and in future reporting on the extent to which the benefits of these changes are now being experienced by the young people.

**Q1 – Do you feel that you had support from all the services to live independently?**

52% answered Yes

**Q2 – Do you feel that the services work well together?**

38% answered Yes

**Q3 – Do you have to tell the same information about your situation to every professional you meet?**

52% answered Yes

**Q4 – Do you have a trusted adult you could contact day or night if you need support?**

65% answered Yes

*The answer to question 4 indicates that progress has been made in ensuring that many more young people who have left care feel they have access to round the clock support of a trusted adult. Questions 1-3 suggest that many young people have had positive experiences, but that significant numbers feel that support from key services is either not well coordinated or they may be poorly informed about the joint working which is taking place. This will be clarified by follow up work.*

2.4 The final set of 6 questions refers to services provided by Social Work & Barnardos. Some young people did not have services from Barnardos but all those with Barnardos have or have had contact with Social Work.

2.5 The first three of these questions reflect on the experience of being in care;

**Q 1 – Do you understand the reasons you were looked after?**

91% of social work responses were positive

90% of Barnardos responses were positive

**Q2 – Were your decisions about your care discussed and explained?**

74% of social work responses were positive

63% of Barnardos responses were positive

**Q3 – Were you satisfied with where you were living when you were looked after?**

83% of social work responses were positive

69% of Barnardos responses were positive

*The answers to these three questions suggest that most young people understand why they were in care and had discussed and had reasonable explanations of the decisions made about their care, and that there was also a high level of satisfaction with where they lived while in care.*

2.6 The Second three questions in this set reflect on the experience of moving on from care. These answers should be seen in the context of similar questions posed at the national “Life After Care” Conference on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2009, involving care leavers aged between 15-25 years from across Scotland, which reported the finding that 92% of those care leavers gave negative responses about how young people feel when they leave care.

**Q4 – Do you feel that you were ready to live independently when you left care?**

57% of social work responses were positive

48% of Barnardos responses were positive

**Q5 – Did you get enough support and preparation to live independently?**

36% of social work responses were positive

44% of Barnardos responses were positive

**Q6 – How satisfied are you with the accommodation that you are presently living in?**

68% of social work responses were positive

75% of Barnardos responses were positive

*Whilst there is no room for complacency, it may be that services in Highland compare well with Scotland in general. It is also important to note that there is no “Control” group of young people who have left home, and their degree of satisfaction with their accommodation, or retrospective perception of their preparedness for the challenges and responsibilities of independent living.*

*The poor levels of satisfaction expressed in respect of question 5 in particular require careful investigation to establish what respondents were referring to in their answers (support may be a reference to personal advice and worker contact or to financial or other assistance).*

*While the level of satisfaction with their present accommodation may be regarded as reasonable, some respondents indicated that this was not their first destination since leaving care. These answers reinforce the message that many young people in Highland moving to independent living have felt vulnerable and would want more support.*

### **3. Conclusion**

- 3.1 The Joint Committee has prioritised the development of services for Looked After and former Looked After children and young people. It will be instructive to evaluate the effectiveness of these service improvements in ensuring better outcomes for care leavers in future.
- 3.2 The findings summarised in this report indicate that there is a high level of satisfaction amongst care leavers with many aspects of the care and support they receive/d but there are significant indicators of areas for further investigation and consultation. Analysis of the data is ongoing and a fuller report drawing on work done on individual case studies will be presented to Committee later this year. The findings reported by definition evaluate services which were provided in some cases several years ago however many issues are current and together all the findings provide benchmarks for future service evaluation.
- 3.3 The evidence from this study suggests that young people leaving care are supported, but require additional support as compared to that historically provided, and possibly more than currently available to them. We will work with those preparing to leave care, and those who have recently made that transition to identify specific action points to improve that support.

## **Recommendation**

The Committee is asked to note the findings and consider the benefit of self evaluation as a tool in quality assuring services.

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## 1. Background to the Study

In response to the publication of *A Guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators*. HMle (2007); an integrated children's services, quality assurance, strategic group (ICSQAG), was established in Highland. Membership was drawn from the statutory agencies of NHS Highland, The Highland Council, Northern Constabulary and their service partners.

An information sharing protocol, to support cross-agency working was drawn up and ratified by Highland's Chief Officers.

As part of the initial scoping exercise the group examined *For Highland's Children 2* (FHC2) work plan and extracted areas of work for evaluation. Prioritisation was given to those areas requiring integrated working, or those directly related to government targets.

Minimal cross agency quality assurance work had been undertaken previously and the ICSQAG agreed to lead on a piece of work to inform methodology, and support implementation of a model for integrated quality assurance across Highland.

A service evaluation of children and young people who had been *Looked After* in Highland was prioritised. There was agreement by the ICSQAG to examine the FHC2 delivery strategy:

*"Make sure young people vulnerable to homelessness and those leaving care have access to a range of accommodation and support services"*.

Using Quality Indicators 2.1 *"Impact on children and young people"* and 2.2 *"Impact on parents/carers and families"* from the HMle guide. *Looked After* young people, statutory agencies and service partners, were asked relevant self-evaluation questions drawn together in a questionnaire format.

The impact on children and YP was expanded from direct questions about accommodation and support services to include associated aspects which may have affected their ability to achieve their full potential. These questions focused on the YPs own perceptions of issues and availability of support in terms of their vulnerability, safety, health, education and any interaction they may have had with the police.

Practitioners who were involved in the care of the YP were asked comparable questions relating to their professional perspective and knowledge of the YP. Areas of consistency and inconsistency were identified between the YPs and professionals answers and also from the inter-professional answers. In addition a quality assured, case study involving comparison of the YPs answers and those given by all statutory professionals involved with the YP, was written up and prominent themes were extrapolated and compared with the broader report analysis.

The service evaluation was informed by *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better* (2007); *These are Our Bairns* (2008), *How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service?* (2006), *Sweet 16?* (2008), *Extraordinary Lives* (2006), *The health of looked after and accommodated children and young people in Scotland messages from research* (2006) and other relevant national and international legislation.

These publications and experiential learning inform us that transition to adulthood is a challenging time for most young people and their families. For *Looked After* young people the challenge can be even greater.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Part 1

A questionnaire was compiled to exam the main issues of homelessness and/or accommodation and the integrated working by the agencies they were in contact with. Additional related questions addressed consideration of their views and wishes, support structures, respect, health, education and police contact, in the delivery of services.

The questionnaire asked comparable questions in respect of services delivered by health (general practitioners), education, police, social work and Barnardos Springboard.

The draft questionnaire was piloted by young people from Barnardo's Springboard and all of their suggestions were incorporating into the final document.

Each young person named on Barnardo's Springboard or The Highland Council data base of young people who had been *Looked After*, and were aged 16-25 years was sent a questionnaire and letter of explanation. Each questionnaire was given a unique index number, which incorporated the young person's age. A return, stamped, pre-addressed envelope for John Dewar House was supplied.

One person within The Highland Council was notified when a completed questionnaire was returned to John Dewar House, and a cross match of the unique index number with the name and address was made. Each young person who completed and returned a questionnaire was sent a £10 Tesco voucher. No one person had access to both the questionnaire and the young person's name. This matching was possible however, if issues of abuse were disclosed.

Each questionnaire incorporated a clear message informing the young person that action would be taken if they disclosed that they or a friend were at risk of abuse

### Part 2

Written consent was required before sending a questionnaire to the young person's professional contact. This process was facilitated by each young person being contacted by their named worker, and the issue of obtaining informed consent was explored. Service managers and named workers were briefed on the methodology of the service evaluation and in particular advised that no incentive or pressure was to be used in obtaining consent to professional contact.

The consent to professional contact was to allow the professional to access the young person's record and complete the questionnaire from documented evidence. Individual consent to each professional was required.

The professional questionnaires were piloted by the relevant agency, prior to use in the service evaluation. Each professional receiving a questionnaire, received a letter of explanation and a stamped, pre-addressed envelope for John Dewar House.

The responses to the questionnaires were entered on a NHS database at John Dewar House. Electronically generated reports and qualitative evaluation of the data is ongoing. The data base holds a wealth of information and this can be further interrogated to provide management information on services delivered to *Looked After* young people in Highland.

### 3. STATISTICS

Two Hundred and five young people were identified from either the Barnardo's Springboard database or from the Highland Council database. The named young people, aged 16 and 17 years are in receipt of an "active" service from Barnardo's Springboard, in line with the current service agreement. There is a corporate responsibility for those young people aged 18, 19 and 20 years; they are entitled to help and support, should they wish it. Those in full-time education aged 18-24 years are also entitled to help and support should they wish it. A breakdown of the age range within the cohort was:

Young people 16 and 17 years – 56  
Young people 18, 19 and 20 years - 103  
Young people 21, 22, 23 and 24 years – 41  
Young people aged 15 years invited to be included – 5  
Young people aged 25 years invited to be included - 1

Questionnaires returned as "not known" at the address on the database – 26  
A breakdown of the ages within this cohort was:

16 years – 0  
17 years – 2  
18 years – 1  
19 years – 7  
20 years – 8  
21 years – 2  
22 years – 5  
23 years – 1  
24 years – 0

One questionnaire was forwarded to the Young Offenders Institute (YOI), Polmont, and returned completed. The £10 Tesco voucher was kept on file by the YOI until the young person is/was released.

Of the one hundred and seventy nine questionnaires believed to have been delivered, completed questionnaires were returned by 43 young people as follows:

15 years – 2  
16 years – 5  
17 years – 10  
18 years – 4  
19 years – 9  
20 years – 7  
21 years – 4  
22 years - 0  
23 years – 2  
24 years - 0

One questionnaire, from a 19 year old, was returned defaced with graphic language. The impact of receiving this clearly seems to indicate that for at least one young person "*we can and must do better*".

Consent for professionals to access the young person's records and complete a questionnaire was as follows:

General Practitioner access to health records – 8  
Teacher access to education records - 12  
Northern Constabulary access to police records – 11  
Barnardo's access to social records – 14  
Social Work access to social records – 12

**4 SUMMARY TABLES**  
**(Quantitative data on those questions summarised in the report.)**

**These 3 tables combine returns on same or similar questions across different services.**

1. Were your views taken into account/ were you listened to?					
Views taken into account/ listened to	Police	Education	Health	SW	Barnardos
Yes		27	36	30	19
No		8	5	8	8
Don't Know		7	4	5	3

2. Did services discuss your situation with you as a Looked After Child?					
Discuss Situation as looked after child	Police	Education	Health	SW	Barnardos
Yes	10	19	25	40	28
No	26	22	15	2	2
Don't Know	5	3	5	2	1

3. Were you asked about your living accommodation?					
Asked about living accommodation	Police	Education	Health	SW	Barnardos
Yes	18		16		
No	23		27		
Don't Know	3		1		

Four general questions provide information on young people's views on the effectiveness of co-ordinated working by the key services of Health, Police, Social Work, Education and Barnardos.

1.	YP General 1 Do you feel that you have had support from all the services to live independently?	Total
	Yes	24
	No	18
	Don't know	4
	Total	46

2.	YP General 2 Do you feel that that the services work well together?	Total
	Yes	17
	No	18
	Don't know	10
	Total	45

3.	YP General 3 Do you have to tell the same information about your situation to every professional you meet?	Total
	Yes	24
	No	18
	Don't know	4
	Total	46

4.	YP General 4 Do you have a trusted adult you could contact, day or night, if you needed support?	Total
	Yes	30
	No	14
	Don't know	2
	Total	46

**These 6 questions relate to Social Work and Barnardos**

1.	Do you understand the reasons you were looked after?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	Yes	40	28
	no	2	2
	don't know	2	1
	Total	44	31

2.	Were your decisions about your care discussed and explained?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	Yes	31	19
	No	7	6
	don't know	4	5
	Total	42	30

3.	Were you satisfied with where you were living when you were looked after?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	Yes	34	20
	no	6	7
	don't know	1	2
	Total	41	29

4.	Do you feel that you were ready to live independently when you left care?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	Yes	24	13
	No	16	11
	don't know	2	3
	Total	42	27

5.	Did you get enough support and preparation to live independently?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	Yes	15	12
	No	20	13
	Don't know	7	2
	Total	42	27

6.	How satisfied are you with the accommodation that you are presently living in?	SW Total	Barnardos Total
	very	28	18
	not very	12	5
	Don't know	3	1
	Total	43	24



