

Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme: Final report

Emily R Munro, Clare Lushey, National Care Advisory Service, Debi Maskell-Graham and Harriet Ward with Lisa Holmes.

Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University.

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Acknowledgements

The study was commissioned by the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF; now Department for Education, DfE). The authors would like to thank all the members of the Research Advisory Group for their help and support.

Care experienced young people, who were trained as peer researchers, have been engaged in the research from its initial conception to analysis and write up of the findings. The authors would like to express their thanks to them for their commitment and dedication to the research and for the work they undertook.

The authors are extremely grateful to the local authorities that participated in the study and all the professionals who contributed, including those who offered ongoing support to the peer researchers. We would also like to express our thanks to the young people and foster carers who took part in the study.

We would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance of colleagues from the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) Costs and Outcomes programme research team (Lisa Holmes and Samantha McDermid) and Jennifer Beecham from the Personal Social Services Research Unit for their input and expertise. We would also like to express our thanks to John Short for his advice and guidance concerning tax and benefit issues. In addition, we are extremely grateful to Matt Padley from the Centre for Research in Social Policy for undertaking the quantitative analysis presented in the report. Finally, we would like to thank Harriet Lowe for formatting and producing the final version of the report.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme pilot (staying put) began in 11 local authorities in July 2008 and ended in March 2011. Staying put is targeted at young people who have 'established familial relationships' with their foster carers and offers this group the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach the age of 21. The key objectives of the pilot are to:

- enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their foster carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support;
- provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment; and
- give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence from their final care placement.

Aims, objectives and methodology

The overarching aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness and impact of the staying put pilots in meeting the objectives above and promoting positive outcomes for young people making the transition from care to independence. It also sought to determine the unit costs of staying put and roll out of the pilot.

A mapping exercise and face-to-face interviews with managers responsible for implementing staying put in each of the 11 pilot authorities were undertaken during phase one of the evaluation (see Munro *et al.*, 2010b for the findings). In phase two in-depth work was undertaken in six authorities and included:

- Face-to-face interviews with 21 young people who stayed put and 11 who did not.
- Thirty one face-to-face interviews with young people's current or former foster carers.
- Telephone interviews with young peoples' leaving care personal advisers (14 personal advisers responsible for 18 in-depth cases).
- Focus groups and verification surveys (five focus groups and 15 verification surveys from five pilot authorities) to identify the time taken by social care practitioners to support young people in staying put placements.
- Scrutiny of quarterly returns submitted to the Department for Education (DfE).

- Analysis of Management Information Systems (MIS) data to explore uptake of staying put and early outcomes.

Key findings

Staying put models of delivery

- Eight authorities adopted a 'pure familial' model for staying put whereby young people remain with their former foster carer, with whom they have an established relationship, post 18. This model attempts to replicate the experiences of young people in the general population and adheres closely to the original tender specification issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).
- A 'hybrid' model was adopted by three authorities. This maximises the opportunity that young people can stay put by removing the pre-condition that young people have to have an established relationship with their carer prior to the age of 18 to be entitled to stay put. However, in practice, the MIS data revealed that greater flexibility under the 'hybrid' model did not massively increase uptake of staying put placements.
- Pilot authorities opted not to include young people with disabilities who were eligible for adult services within the pilot; to avoid duplicating existing provision. However, the majority offered staying put placements to young people with disabilities who were below the threshold for adult services. This was identified as being important to address a perceived gap in existing provision for this group.
- Most of the in-depth authorities (four out of six) required young people to be in (or actively demonstrating a commitment to being in) EET to be permitted to stay put. Some interviewees expressed concerns that strict EET criteria may exclude some of the most vulnerable young people from benefitting from an ongoing placement, thereby denying them further support to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes in the longer term.

Staying put or leaving care? Factors influencing the decision-making process

- The majority of foster carers were willing to offer staying put placements. The most common reason for doing so was that carers' viewed young people as 'part of the family'. This sense of belonging was also a key factor influencing young peoples' decisions to stay put.
- Thirty one out of 36 foster carers were willing to extend placements for the young people in their care; 23 of these young people took up this offer. Four young people expressed a desire to remain with carers who were either unable or unwilling to offer a staying put placement.

- The most common explanation young people provided for not wanting to stay put was poor quality relationships with their carers or others in the placement. Other key factors were the desire to be 'free' and 'independent' or to return to live with birth family. Those who did not stay put tended to experience multiple accommodation changes.
- Five foster carers made the decision not to offer young people the opportunity to stay put. In three cases young people's behaviour appeared to precipitate these decisions. In two cases the carers expressed concerns about the young people's ability to develop the skills needed for adulthood if they were to remain in their placement for longer.

Staying put: contributing to providing young people with a secure base and nurturing attachments?

- Contrary to negative media coverage and public and professional portrayals of the care system, findings from the study highlight that many foster families offer a warm, nurturing environment, compensatory care and a secure base for adolescents.
- Qualitative findings revealed that the majority of young people (15 out of 18; 83%) judged to have a strong and secure base within their current foster placement, opted to stay put.
- The majority (16 out of 19; 84%¹) of young people who stayed put were close to their foster carers and would turn to them for help and support. Ten young people reported that they were not close to their foster carers and only three of these stayed put.
- Interview data revealed that the vast majority of young people were positive about their leaving care personal advisers and the support they received (27 out of 32; 84%), although those who stayed put were slightly more positive (19 out of 21; 90%) than those who did not (eight out of 11; 73%).
- Once young people made the transition to independent living arrangements their support networks contracted; over half (ten out of 18; 56%²) of care leavers revealed that they had a network of just three people who they could turn to for support and advice. This is of concern given the psychological challenges associated with making the transition from care to independence.

Experiences and impact of staying put

- Findings highlighted a range of benefits of staying put, including the fact that it:

¹ Missing data on four young people that stayed put.

² Missing on four young people.

- empowers young people and gives them greater control of the timing of their transition from care to independence;
 - means that young people are not penalised by virtue of their care status; they are offered the opportunity to experience transitions that are more akin to those experienced by their peers in the general population;
 - allows young people to remain in a nurturing family environment where they can mature and develop, prepare for independence, and receive ongoing support; and
 - offers continuity and stability to facilitate engagement in EET.
- Young people who stayed put were more than twice as likely to be in full time education at 19 compared to those that did not (55% and 22% respectively). In addition, a slightly higher percentage of those who stayed put were in full time training and employment at 19 compared to those that did not (25% and 22% respectively). This may reflect the EET criteria imposed by authorities, however it remains the case that 40% of young people that did not stay put were NEET for 'other circumstances' (i.e. not due to illness or disability) aged 19 ($p = <0.01$, significant).

Pathways to independence

- Interviews with young people indicated that the majority (24; 75%) did not feel that the pathway planning process had assisted with preparation and planning for independence. Consistent with previous research, criticisms centred upon the bureaucratic nature of the process; which was seen to serve the needs of the organisation rather than the young people concerned (Edwards, 2011; Munro *et al.*, 2011). However, eight young people (25%) were positive about the pathway planning process as it gave them more time to explore their educational aspirations, future plans and to prepare for independence.
- Data on transitions from care to independence were available on 22 young people (nine who had stayed put but moved to independent living arrangements during course of the evaluation and 13 who did not stay put). They took one of three pathways to independence. The 'direct pathway' which involved young people making the transition straight from foster care to independent living in a council or privately rented property. 'Transitional placement pathways' which involved young people living in one or more supported living placements before living independently. Such placements were intended to offer young people support as they acquired the skills that they needed to be able to secure and maintain their own tenancies in the future and thus acted as a bridge to independence (National Care Advisory

Service/Catch 22, 2009). Some young people experienced 'complex pathways' marked by multiple moves and changes.

- Findings revealed that young people most commonly took either the direct (9; 41%) or complex (9; 41%) pathway from care to independence. The direct pathway was the most common pathway for young people who stayed put (six out of nine; 67%). In contrast the complex route was the most common pathway for those that did not stay put (six out of 13; 46%).
- Four (out of nine; 44%) of the complex pathways were precipitated by young people because they did not have a close attachment to their carers. All but one of the young people who experienced a complex pathway acknowledged that they had not been emotionally and/or financially prepared or ready to move when they were aged 18.
- 'Transitional placement pathways' were least common (four out of 22; 18%) and were confined to cases where young people were unable to stay put and thus had to make the transition to independence earlier than may have been in their best interests.

Organisational implications and the costs of staying put

- The financial contributions that children's social care made towards placement costs ranged across authorities. Contributions towards placement costs from young people were dependent upon their circumstances and the authorities' financial arrangements.
- Some authorities continued to pay carers the same amount they were being paid prior to the young person turning 18. In other authorities, however, there was an expectation that foster carers would accept a lower level of remuneration on the basis that expectations upon them changed when the young person reached 18. In a small number of cases foster carers objected to reduced payments as they did not feel that their responsibilities had diminished. It should be recognised that some carers may not be able to afford to continue to care for a young person without financial assistance.
- The annual cost to social care of providing a staying put placement is calculated to be £14, 278 (this includes all the activities to support a young person in their staying put placement and placement fee/allowances from children's social care). In comparison, the annual costs to social care of providing a local authority foster placement to a young person aged under 18 is £25,828 (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008)³.

³ Figures inflated to 2010-11 using PSSRU inflation indices (Curtis, 2010).

- The total estimated national social care cost of staying put per annum is in the region of two and a half million pounds (£2,675,921)⁴ based on 530 care leavers staying put. Dividing this total national cost by the number of local authorities in England (152), this cost equates to an average of around £17,500 per local authority per year (based on between three and four care leavers staying put in each authority).

Implications for policy and practice

- A key factor influencing both foster carers' decisions to extend placements and young people's willingness to stay put was the quality of these relationships and the extent to which secure attachments had been established. This highlights the importance of effective care planning and matching.
- Requiring young people to have an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carers and/or to be in EET may deny some young people the opportunity to stay put, in particular those who have experienced placement instability and/or have complex needs.
- MIS data revealed that removing the requirement to be a in a long-term foster placement (where young people have an 'established familial relationship') with their carer, did not lead to a significant rise in the numbers staying put. On this basis local authorities could adopt a more flexible and needs led approach without bearing significant additional costs. This would also allow young people to be active agents in the decision concerning when to make the transition from care to independence (see Munro *et al.*, 2011 for further discussion).
- Support networks play a part in promoting resilience and assist young people to cope with change, yet support networks contracted once young people had left care and moved to independence. Care experienced young people who were involved in the study as peer researchers suggested that authorities should be more proactive in encouraging foster carers to remain in contact with, and offer ongoing support to, former looked after children. The majority of foster carers were happy for young people to stay in touch but often expected those who had been in their care to get in touch with them. Given past hurt and rejection young people may not feel entitled or able to do this. This raises questions about what more could be done to support the continuation of positive and supportive relationships.
- Fee and allowance payments to foster carers varied between authorities as did the sources of this income. It would be valuable to outline minimum allowances for carers

⁴ Based on 530 care leavers staying put.

and expectations concerning the contributions from social care, housing and other agencies.

- Not all young people want to remain in care longer, irrespective of what professionals and foster carers perceive to be in their best interests. It is important that packages of support are available to meet the needs of those who opt to make the transition from care to independence before they reach legal adulthood, particularly given that these young people may be most vulnerable and have the most complex needs.

Conclusion

A range of benefits to staying put were identified and the consensus was that it provided a framework to maximise the likelihood of young people making successful transitions to independence and mitigated the risk of young people's circumstances deteriorating. Those in staying put were significantly more likely to be in full time education at 19 than their counterparts who did not stay put. A higher proportion of young people who stayed put were also pursuing higher education than those who did not. Higher educational attainment should yield cost savings in the future as these young people are in a position to earn more and pay more taxes and are less likely to be reliant on State support later in life. Qualitative data on a small sample revealed that those who did not stay put were more likely to experience complex transition pathways and housing instability after they left care. This is costly to the public purse but also has wellbeing costs for the young people concerned. Research from the US suggests that the costs of staying put may be offset overtime by improved outcomes:

If states adopt a policy of allowing young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday... the potential benefits to foster youth and society will more than offset the cost to government (Peters et al., 2009, p.9).

Chapter one: Introduction and Methodology

An increasing number of young people in the general population are choosing to postpone their departure from the family home and opting to live with their parents into their early twenties (Berrington, Stone and Falkingham, 2009; Choroszewicz and Wolff, 2010). Transitions to adulthood are now more gradual and varied than they used to be and families invest considerable resources into supporting their children into early adulthood (Schoeni and Ross, 2005; Bynner *et al.*, 2002; Jones 2002). Although concerns have been expressed that this has created a 'dependency culture' a growing body of evidence suggest that:

Attaining adult roles (as measured by independence from the natal family, union and parenthood) is simply more difficult than it was... In fact, the vast majority of young adults in their late teens and early twenties are not at leisure – they are working, going to school, or doing both at the same time (Berlin, Furstenberg and Waters, 2010).

There is also growing awareness that class and cultural practice influence the pace at which young people make the transition to independence and that not all young people can rely on their families for financial or emotional support into early adulthood (Jones, 2005; Stein and Munro, 2008). Research demonstrates that young people making the transition from care to independence are at high risk of social exclusion and poor outcomes including, low educational attainment, unemployment, poverty, mental health problems, social isolation, homelessness, instability and involvement in crime (Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Biehal and Wade 1999; Broad, 1999; Cashmore and Paxman, 1996; Courtney *et al.*, 2001; 2005; Munro, Stein and Ward, 2005; Stein, Pinkerton and Kelleher, 2000; Stein and Carey, 1986; Stein and Munro, 2008). In response, policy and practice developments have been implemented which aim to delay young people's transitions, enhance preparation and planning, improve the consistency of support and strengthen financial arrangements to assist this group (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000; Children and Young Persons Act 2008; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010). The *Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010) intended to make sure that relevant and former relevant children are provided with comprehensive personal support to help them achieve their potential as they make the transition from care to independence. There is also increasing awareness that corporate parenting responsibilities extend beyond legal adulthood. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* identify that:

- preparation and planning for transitions should begin early and that young people should be involved in this process;
- consideration should be given to children's age, gender, maturity and particular circumstances to inform the decision making process; and
- aftercare support (including 'ongoing education and vocational training opportunities' and 'access to social, legal and health services, together with appropriate financial support') should be provided (General Assembly resolution A/RES/64/142, 2010, para. 131-136).

Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilots

In 2007-2008 the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) implemented two pilot programmes: Right2BCared4 and Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme, which were aimed at improving young people's transitions from care to adulthood. Findings from the Right2BCared4 pilots (which sought to encourage young people to remain looked after until the age of 18, provide them with a greater say in the decision making process preceding their exit from care; and ensure they were properly prepared for independent living) are reported elsewhere (Edwards, 2011; Munro *et al.*, 2010a; Munro *et al.*, 2011a). This report presents findings from the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot (staying put) which began in 11 local authorities in July 2008 and ended in March 2011. Staying put is targeted at young people who have 'established familial relationships' with foster carers and offers this group the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach the age of 21. The key objectives of the pilot are to:

- enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their foster carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support;
- provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment; and
- give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence from their final care placement.

Methodology

The overarching aim of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness and impact of the staying put pilots on meeting the objectives above. The objectives of the evaluation are:

- To explore the role and contribution that staying put can make to promoting positive outcomes for young people, including:
 - remaining in employment, education or training (EET);
 - nurturing attachments to significant 'parental' figures; and
 - making the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support.
- To identify models of best practice in setting up and implementing the staying put pilots, including:
 - training and support for young people and foster carers;
 - promoting and empowering young people to participate in planning their transition to independence;
 - local authority management of 'capacity' in order to both support young people who wish to remain with carers at 18+ and also maintain a sufficient supply for younger children; and
 - resolving insurance, tax and benefit issues and other barriers to implementation of the pilot.
- Calculate the unit costs of staying put and explore how these compare with standard leaving care provision and Right2BCared4 (utilising data from the Right2BCared4 evaluation).
- Consider the costs of rolling out the staying put pilot to other local authorities.

Key research questions include:

- To what extent do the approaches to developing and implementing the staying put pilots vary across local authorities, and why?
- What approaches have been adopted in relation to fees and allowances for young people and foster carers?
- What are the implications for overall numbers of foster carers required and for local authority strategic planning?
- What influences foster carers' decisions about whether or not to continue to foster young people beyond the age of 18?
- What influences young people's decisions about whether or not to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18?

- To what extent do young people that have chosen to stay on believe they have benefitted from the opportunity to do so?
- How do rights, responsibilities and relationships between young people and foster carers develop and adapt as young people enter adulthood and how equipped do young people feel for living independently?
- Are young people who stay put better prepared for independence than those young people who leave care earlier?
- What exit strategies (i.e. procedures to support young people as they make the transition from foster care to independent living arrangements) have the pilots developed and are these effective in ensuring that young people are given appropriate advice and support?
- Do those young people who stay put follow different trajectories from those who do not, for example, in terms of education, training, employment and aspirations for the future?
- What are the similarities and differences in the costs and outcomes of standard leaving care provision, compared with Right2BCared4 and staying put?

A mixed methods approach was adopted. During the first phase of the evaluation (December 2009 – April 2010) a mapping exercise and face-to-face interviews with managers responsible for implementing staying put in each of the 11 pilot authorities were undertaken, to explore:

- how authorities were actually implementing staying put (and any changes compared to plans submitted to the former DCSF); and
- challenges and issues that they were facing implementing staying put in practice (see Munro *et al.*, 2010b for the findings).

In Phase 2 the following in-depth work was undertaken in six pilot authorities:

Face-to-face interviews with 21 young people who stayed put and 11 who did not stay put including five cases where young people opted out of staying put ('young person led opt out'), four cases where foster carers were not willing or able to accommodate young people once they reached legal adulthood ('foster care opt out') and two cases where the local authority did not allow the young person to remain in their foster placement post 18. These interviews were conducted by peer researchers/care experienced young people trained by staff from the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) and Centre for Child and Family

Research (CCFR) to undertake research in order to minimise the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Kilpatrick *et al.*, 2007). The purpose of the interviews was to explore:

- what informed their decisions about whether or not to stay put and the role and contribution of foster carers, social workers, personal advisers, independent reviewing officers (IROs), friends and family in this process;
- to what extent those who stayed felt they had benefitted and how they felt their relationship with their foster carers had changed over time;
- experiences of living independently for those who left at 18;
- involvement in decision making and preparation for leaving care; and
- exit strategies and the effectiveness of support from children's social care and foster carers with the transition from care to independence.

Face-to-face interviews with young people's current or former foster carers (31 interviews). Interviews with foster carers who continued to provide accommodation and support post 18 (staying put foster carers) examined:

- what influenced their decision about extending the young person's placement post 18;
- fee and allowance arrangements and perspectives concerning the adequacy of these;
- training and support provided by children's social care to support the fostering task;
- changes in role and responsibilities as young people moved from adolescence to adulthood; and
- perspectives on the role and contribution of staying put in promoting positive outcomes for the young person in their care.

In circumstances where foster carers were unwilling or unable to maintain placements ('foster carer opt-out'), the reasons for this were explored. Interviews with foster carers who were willing to continue providing care post 18 but who were not required to do so ('young person opt-out') explored reasons why they were willing to offer ongoing care and any concerns or anxieties they had about doing so. Interviews with both groups of carers also examined ongoing support and contact with individual young people and their perspectives on their development and progress.

Telephone interviews with young people’s leaving care personal advisers (14 personal advisers responsible for 18 in-depth cases). The purpose of these interviews was to collect case specific information about young people’s past experiences, decisions and progress and to obtain professional perspectives on:

- the role and contribution staying put has had on individual young people’s trajectories;
- why they thought young people opted not to stay put (where applicable) and how they found the move to independence;
- support, preparation and relationships between carers and young people; and
- care pathways and outcomes.

Focus groups and verification surveys with social care practitioners (five focus groups and 15 verification surveys from five pilot authorities). The focus groups and follow-up verification surveys were used to identify the time taken by social care practitioners to support young people in staying put placements. This support included, the decision for the young person to stay put, any ongoing support to the young person, and any moves on to independence following a staying put placement. The focus groups provided data on overarching practice issues and ‘time use activity data’ was collected from both data sources to calculate the unit costs of staying put. Unit costs were calculated by multiplying the ‘time use activity data’ with salary and on costs (including overheads) for the relevant social care practitioners. The unit costs presented throughout this report are for the 2010/11 financial year. Further details of the unit cost methodology are outlined in appendix one.

Scrutiny of quarterly returns submitted to the DfE⁵. The pilot authorities were required to submit quarterly returns to DfE. These were scrutinised by the evaluation team. The returns included headline facts and figures from the last quarter along with financial data; details of the recruitment and support process in the pilot (arrangements for the recruitment and support of staying put carers; availability of training to carers; any issues relating to tax, benefits or young people’s contributions; details of any progress against the pilot project plan and any outstanding issues or concerns).

Management information system (MIS) data were also sought from all 11 pilot authorities to explore uptake of staying put and early outcomes. The requested information was supplied by **six** (four in-depth authorities and two from the wider pilot) local authorities. Data were supplied on two cohorts. The first was comprised of all young people who met the criteria for participation in the staying put pilot. Cohort two comprised of young people (from the same local authorities as cohort two) who met the same profile in 2006-7, prior to

⁵ These were not systematically completed or returned by all the pilot authorities.

implementation of staying put (the ‘comparative sample’). The datasets were analysed to compare (as far as possible) the outcomes of young people in similar circumstances who had the option of staying put with those who did not have this option (‘comparative sample’). Similarities and differences in the needs, circumstances and early outcomes between groups in cohort one were also explored.

Clarifying information in the final stages of the evaluation was sought from the in-depth authorities to determine which young people were eligible to stay put, if there were any conditions that young people had to meet (i.e. in education, training or employment) and whether exceptions were made, details on payments made to carers providing placements for young people aged 18 and over, and to ascertain whether or not they were intending to mainstream staying put once pilot funding ended.

Table 1.1 below provides a summary of the data supplied by each local authority participating in the in-depth evaluation.

Table 1.1: Summary of data provided by LAs participating in the in-depth evaluation

| | LA L | LA M | LA N | LA P | LA Q | LA R | Total |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Face-to-face interviews with young people | 6 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 32 |
| Face-to-face interviews with foster carers | 6 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 31 |
| Telephone interviews with leaving care personal advisers ⁶ | 1 (2 young people) | 3 (4 young people) | 2 (3 young people) | 1 (1 young person) | 4 (4 young people) | 3 (4 young people) | 14 (18 young people) |
| Focus groups | (9 attendees) | - | (5 attendees) | (3 attendees) | (2 attendees) | (6 attendees) | 5 (25 attendees) |
| Verification surveys | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 14 |
| MIS data | Yes | Yes | Yes | - | Yes ⁷ | - | 4 |
| Quarterly returns | Yes | - | Yes | Yes | Yes | - | 4 |

⁶ Some leaving care personal advisers provided case specific information on more than one young person in the sample.

⁷ Unable to use as data were not supplied on those that did not stay put.

Table 1.2 below provides details on all young people that were part of the in-depth evaluation. This includes 32 that took part in face-to-face interviews and four young people who were unable to participate directly but gave research staff at CCFR permission to interview their former or current foster carers.

Table 1.2: Characteristics of young people that participated in interviews

| | Stayed put | Did not stay put | Total |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Young men | 11 (55%) | 9 (45%) | 20 |
| Young women | 12 (75%) | 4 (25%) | 16 |
| Unaccompanied asylum seeking children | 1 (50%) | 1 (50%) | 2 |
| Parent | 2 (67%) | 1 (33%) | 3 |
| All | 23 (64%) | 13 (36%) | 36 |

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data from MIS were imported into SPSS for analysis. Data were re-coded to allow for comparisons: across years, local authorities, models (i.e. pure familial or hybrid); and typologies (i.e. Sinclair *et al.*, 2007); to explore possible relationships between placement types and durations; and EET status according to whether young people stayed put or not. A series of cross tabulations were performed to present possible associations between the characteristics, circumstances and outcomes of young people and to make comparisons between those that stayed put and those that did not. Tests of significance (Pearson Correlation, 2 tailed) were performed in order to determine whether or not there were significant correlations between those that stayed put and those that did not and those in 'pure familial' models and those in 'hybrid' models with regards to EET outcomes, and the duration of their foster placement prior to staying put or leaving care.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative interviews were recorded and transcribed. Manual coding of young people's interview transcripts was carried out by the peer researchers with support and training provided by the research team at CCFR, Loughborough University and NCAS. Thematic analysis of all the data was also conducted by the CCFR research team using the qualitative software analysis package NVivo 8. Attention was given to exploring variations in practice within and between authorities, considering variations in the characteristics and experiences

of those who stayed put and those who did not, as well as similarities and differences in the perspectives of young people, foster carers, and leaving care personal advisers.

Ethical approval was obtained from Loughborough University's Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the evaluation. In presenting the study findings, to protect anonymity and confidentiality, details concerning the local authorities and research participants have been withheld. Direct quotes from young people, foster carers and social care staff participating in interviews have been used throughout the report; where names have been given these have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved. Minor details have also been changed in all the case studies to protect anonymity; however none of these details relate to the issues that the examples are used to illustrate.

Strengths and limitations of the data

The methodology employed was intended to maximise opportunities to answer the research questions within the available budget and in the prescribed timescale. Rich qualitative data were obtained during the course of the research. Forty two (98%) out of 43 young people randomly selected for inclusion in the interview sample agreed to participate, with 32 (74%) going on to take part in an interview. The publicity materials to encourage young people's participation in the study and the research tools were developed in collaboration with care experienced young people (i.e. peer researchers). As such the language and terminology employed was accessible to the target audience and the topics coverage reflected the issues that the peer researchers perceived to be critical in exploring young people's transitions from care to independence. The majority of the data obtained by the peer researchers provided vivid accounts of young people's experiences of foster care, preparation and planning for early adulthood and what influenced decisions concerning whether or not to stay put and, where applicable, their experience of making the transition from care to independence. These accounts were complemented by those collected from foster carers and leaving care workers; thus facilitating exploration of similarities and differences in perceptions of both the operation of the pilot and how young people were faring on their journey's towards independence. However, the requirement to complete the evaluation within two years, when young people are entitled to stay put for up to three years, and within a limited budget means that:

- the in-depth sample of young people who did not stay put is smaller than would be desirable to more fully understand similarities and differences in the pathways and experiences of this group compared to their staying put counterparts;⁸
- there is a lack of data on young people's transitions from staying put to

⁸ Priority was afforded to exploring the experiences of those who stayed put.

independence (as the majority of young people had not yet made this transition). This limits the capacity to explore the effectiveness of exit strategies when young people leave staying put placements and whether those who stay put are better prepared for independence than those young people who leave care earlier;

- it has not been possible to accurately determine the proportion and characteristics of those who stay put up to age 21. This data would have assisted in predicting the financial burden of implementing staying put and the implications for the recruitment and retention of foster carers; and
- outcome data are limited (see below for further discussion).

Exploring costs and outcomes

Outcome data

To minimise the research burden on local authorities the research team intended to make extensive use of MIS data routinely collected for the looked after children national statistical returns (including data relating to young people's characteristics and care histories as well as outcome indicators for looked after children, educational qualifications of care leavers and former care leavers on their 19th birthday) to facilitate comparison of similarities and differences in the needs, circumstances and outcomes attained by those who stayed put and those who did not. The same dataset was also sought for a 'comparative sample' of young people looked after in 2006-7 (from the same local authorities but prior to the commencement of staying put) to assist in exploring the impact of the pilot. In addition, the research team also sought to collect core data on the length of time the young people from the MIS sample stayed put (where applicable) and on education, training and employment; health; and accommodation for young people aged 19-21. However, in practice there were a number of challenges with this aspect of the evaluation:

- Firstly, despite numerous requests only six out of 11 local authorities supplied MIS data. Further, it did not prove possible to secure follow up data on the sample beyond their 19th birthdays or on the duration of staying put placements because authorities cease to collect data on episodes of care or key milestones post 18 and they do not routinely collect data on EET status and type of accommodation beyond young people's 19th birthdays.
- Secondly, it had been anticipated that one of the key outcome measures would be EET status but the majority of local authorities used engagement in EET as a criterion for young people's eligibility for the pilot, thus limiting the scope to determine the contribution that staying put may have made to promoting improved EET outcomes. However, analysis was performed to explore whether there were any

differences between those authorities delivering the 'pure familial' model⁹ of staying put and those that adopted the 'hybrid' model¹⁰.

- Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that the short timeframe between the end of the pilot and the evaluation meant that a number of young people were still living in staying put placements, which limited the opportunity to explore whether positive outcomes could be sustained once young people moved to independence. It is also important to highlight that the sample were still in a transitional phase at the completion of the pilot and that 'outcomes' at this stage should not be viewed as destinations (Jones, 2005; Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

Costs data

Cost comparisons

The unit costs of staying put have been compared with the unit costs of standard leaving care processes. The same methodology to calculate unit costs has been used across all research studies that have been carried out as part of CCFR's costs and outcomes research programme; the comparison (standard leaving care) costs have been obtained from a wider sample of local authorities, not all of which have been involved in the staying put evaluation. The standard leaving care costs were also calculated for previous financial years. Although the costs have been inflated so that they all relate to the 2010/11 financial year, there may have been changes in practice that have not been captured. Therefore, caution is required when considering direct comparisons.

Cost variations according to need

The research team intended to carry out focus groups with leaving care and fostering teams to determine the additional costs associated with delivery of staying put and to explore wider issues concerning wider policy and practice implications of the pilot. During the preliminary stages of the evaluation it became evident that the staying put placements were not being routinely supported by the family placement or fostering teams and this limited the scope to explore recruitment and retention and training of foster carers and capacity issues. Data were collected from the core professionals involved in supporting young people in staying put placements. However, the small number of practitioners involved in the pilots meant that insufficient 'time spent activity' data were available to explore variations in activity and therefore costs to support children with differing needs. Qualitative data from the focus groups and findings from CCFR's wider costs and outcomes research programme do still

⁹ Young people are required to have an established familial relationship with their carers to be offered the opportunity to stay put.

¹⁰ The prerequisite of an established familial relationship is removed.

provide some insight into how young people's circumstances may impact on the level of support they require (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008, Holmes, McDermid and Sempik, 2010).

Cost of rolling out staying put

Pilot local authorities were expected to submit quarterly returns to DfE including details on financial arrangements for staying put and if and how they intended to continue staying put beyond the length of the pilot. However, these data were not recorded in a standardised format and a number of authorities failed to return the requested data for each quarter. This undermined the possibility of ascertaining how funding was allocated and the set up costs of the pilots. However, estimates of the cost of rolling out staying put nationally have been calculated using MIS data.

Costs and outcomes

Given the limitations of the management information data outlined above, along with the eligibility criteria set by the pilot sites, it has not been possible to carry out an analysis of the relationship between costs and outcomes for the cohort of young people that experienced staying put placement across the pilot sites. However, detailed information about specific cases collected as part of the qualitative interviews has been utilised to create detailed 'cost case studies' to illustrate both the costs and the outcomes for individual children. This approach has been used extensively by the research team (see for example, Ward *et al.*, 2008; Holmes, Westlake and Ward, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, forthcoming) and allows for exploration and comparison of the costs and outcomes of different care pathways and transitions into independence.

Chapter two: Staying Put Models of Delivery

Fifty two percent of looked after children aged 16 or over are placed with foster carers (Department for Education, 2011). Staying put is intended to offer those with an 'established familial relationship' with their carers the opportunity to remain living with them beyond 18 and up to 21 years of age. Although there was no operational definition of how an established familial relationship should be determined, the inference was that young people would have lived with their current foster carers for some time and thus had an opportunity to develop an attachment to them. The pilot therefore excludes those who have experienced placement instability and change as they approach adulthood, as well as those who are placed with parents, or in secure units, children's homes or hostels. These groups may be more vulnerable and have more complex needs than those who are eligible to stay put (Munro *et al.*, 2011a; Sinclair *et al.*, 2007).

In order to facilitate understanding of the characteristics and experiences of the staying put cohort, young people's experiences were explored with reference to Sinclair and colleagues' (2007) typology which assists in understanding similarities and differences in young people's pathways through care. In the context of the current study the following groups are most relevant:

- 1) those who were under the age of 11 at first entry but who are now older (adolescent graduates);
- 2) children first looked after when aged 11 or over and not abused (adolescent entrants);
- 3) children first looked after when aged 11 or over and with a need code of abuse (abused adolescents); and
- 4) Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

(Sinclair *et al.*, 2007, p.67).

The adolescent graduates account for the highest proportion of the 11+ care population (and 26% of Sinclair *et al.*'s total sample of 7,399 looked after children). Sinclair and colleagues found that this group tended to have experienced abuse prior to entry to care and to have more challenging behaviour than young entrants (first looked after before the age of 11 and still under ten) but less so than other adolescents (the exception being UASC). Abused adolescents accounted for 9% of their total sample (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007). Case studies suggest that this group have emotional and behavioural difficulties and may struggle to settle and integrate into new placements due to repeat rejection and trauma. Adolescent entrants

also exhibited challenging behaviour although they did not become looked after due to abuse or neglect. Asylum seekers (5% of the total sample) were less likely to exhibit difficult behaviour that carers may find challenging to manage (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007, see p. 73-83). Similarities and differences in the pre- and in-care experiences of these different groups will influence their needs and the opportunities they have for establishing a secure base in the care system; this in turn may influence whether or not they are eligible for and/or choose to stay put into early adulthood. This will be explored further throughout the report. First, however, it is necessary to explore the eligibility criteria that local authorities decided to introduce when they established their pilots.

‘Pure familial’ and ‘hybrid’ models of delivery

To implement the principles of staying put in practice each local authority introduced their own criteria in order to articulate which young people would be eligible to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 (see also Munro *et al.*, 2010b). Analysis revealed that eight out of 11 pilot authorities (and five out of six of the in-depth authorities) had adopted a ‘pure familial model’ of staying put. In the authorities adopting this model young people were eligible to stay put if they had an ‘established familial relationship’ with their foster carers. Whilst this was rarely formally defined by practitioners or managers, interview data revealed that the length of time young people had spent living with their foster carers and the quality of these relationships were important in determining whether young people were eligible to stay put; these pilots were orientated towards replicating ‘normal family life’ and maintaining (at least relatively) long term stable placements. As one staying put manager articulated:

We created an ethos for our group, which was that staying put is about remaining within the family (LA N).

He went on to highlight the importance of affording young people in care similar opportunities and experiences as their peers in the general population might expect, explaining that:

Staying put is about remaining with the family or within the family... We have one foster carer in staying put and her own son is slightly older... Her son went off to college and he came back. He went off to live with mates. It failed, he came back... Staying put has allowed [her foster son] a lot of these opportunities... We just want this to be a family thing (LA N).

Arguably this model adheres to the original intention of the pilot which infers a pre-existing relationship and attachment between the young person and their carer which can be ‘built upon and nurtured’. However, it may exclude certain young people from benefitting from extended placements post 18. Young people in residential care or who have experienced

relatively recent or multiple placement changes or breakdowns and may have more complex needs are not eligible to stay put if these strict criteria are applied¹¹. Interviews suggested that these young people may be in greatest need of ongoing care, as one staying put manager outlined:

There will be some young people who've been severely disadvantaged because they haven't enjoyed an established relationship... As they near the end of their childhood as it were, they're least prepared...to survive (LA S).

In recognition of this, three pilot sites (including one of the in-depth authorities) adopted a 'hybrid model' of staying put and sought to maximise the opportunity that young people could stay by removing the pre-requisite of 'established relationships' between young people and foster carers. These LAs recognised the role and value of maintaining supportive foster placements and promoting continuity of care but highlighted the importance of a young person centred response. They raised concerns about denying young people the opportunity to stay put if they had not had the benefit of long term stable care in the past and suggested that young people should not be penalised if placements breakdown. It was also identified that flexibility was required because it is not always in a young person's best interests to remain with their current foster carers (see also, Ward *et al.*, 2008). For example, the manager in one of the pilot authorities explained that they had a case in which a young man had been in a long term placement with foster carers but that relationships had become strained. Finding another staying put placement was seen as a solution in order to preserve longstanding relationships rather than jeopardising these. In another local authority a staying put manager suggested:

Staying put [with current] carers is obviously the number one priority... But in my head it's in two bits, it's staying put with your carer if possible, but if not then staying within another protective environment (LA L, emphasis added).

Similarities and differences in other eligibility criteria were also identified amongst the pilot authorities. The overarching models and additional conditions introduced in the in-depth pilot authorities are outlined below.

¹¹ The needs of those young people who are not eligible for staying put may be met in other ways by the authorities in question and therefore the pilot needs to be seen in the wider context of leaving care provision.

In-depth authorities: models of delivery

Education, training and employment as conditions of staying put

Five out of six of the in-depth pilot authorities were operating a ‘pure familial model’ of staying put¹². As Table 2.1 shows, in four of the in-depth pilot authorities young people were also expected to be in (or actively demonstrating a commitment to being in) EET to be permitted to stay put. One authority (LA L) did not allow those in employment to stay put.

Table 2.1: Models of delivery and core criteria for staying put (in-depth pilot authorities)

| Local authority | Model | Requirement to be in EET |
|------------------------|---------------|---|
| L | Hybrid | Required to be in education or training (not permissible to be in employment) |
| M | Pure familial | Yes |
| N | Pure familial | Yes (some exemptions) |
| P | Pure familial | Yes (some exemptions) |
| Q | Pure familial | Yes (some exemptions) |
| R | Pure familial | No |

The introduction of EET criteria appears to be linked to the way in which the specification for the pilot was interpreted. One of the main aims of the pilot is to ‘provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in EET’; some appeared to have introduced this as a ‘condition’ rather than an objective or longer term outcome. Other considerations also appeared to influence the position that some authorities took in this respect, for example one staying put manager explained:

If somebody’s going to stay put, they’ve got to be basically employed or in education, training or a position to move into it... if young people are not engaged, just staying in bed all day... [you’re spending a lot of money for nothing] (LA M).

¹² Data from one of these authorities revealed that they were committed to supporting and maintaining young people’s existing and enduring relationships with their current carers, occasional exceptions were made and staying put was offered as a transitional arrangement for former relevant looked after children.

Another explained that:

The criteria are fairly strict in the sense that they need to be in education, training or employment. We're looking at those achievers rather than those non-achievers... [although] we do need to be flexible in the current economic climate (LA Q).

However, it should also be acknowledged that in three out of four of the in-depth authorities with EET criteria it was apparent that there were certain circumstances in which young people were permitted to stay even if they were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The main reasons cited by LAs were if young people were:

- undertaking voluntary work;
- unable to engage in EET due to ill-health; or
- if young people were made redundant or left their course (in which case six to 12 months leeway was given).

LA N also highlighted the importance of considering young people's individual needs and that they would support activities that would maximise the likelihood that young people would be able to engage in EET in the future, for example, engagement in activities to build their self-esteem. One in-depth pilot authority opted not to introduce eligibility criteria with regards to EET and instead took an alternative and 'all inclusive' approach because:

In fact those that aren't in education, employment or training are the ones who are more likely to need to stay longer (staying put manager, LA R).

This sentiment was also reflected by other staying put managers in the wider evaluation who suggested that expecting young people to be in EET potentially excludes the most vulnerable young people from ongoing placements with foster carers, thereby denying them further support to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes in the longer term. A staying put manager reflected that:

Another ambition of mine is not to base everything on a child's education status, because the After Care legislation was basically about keeping young people that are in education. My belief is that some of the young people that are out of education or any employment are in fact the most vulnerable and I want to do what I can to redress that balance (LA L).

Indeed, young people with evidence of additional support needs (including, for example, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and offending behaviour) often experience multiple placement changes, are less likely to complete schooling or access specialist

provision to meet their needs (Ward *et al.*, 2008). A vicious circle can occur whereby they are alienated from efforts to provide effective support (Holmes and Ward, 2006). Strict eligibility criteria mean that the availability of extended care may vary inversely with the needs of the leaving care population (the Inverse Care Law: Hart, 1971).

Variations according to placement type and provider

Data from pilot local authorities also revealed variations in decisions concerning whether or not young people in certain types of placement were eligible to stay put; decisions in this respect appeared to be influenced both by financial considerations and the availability of alternative service provision. Table 2.2 provides an overview¹³. It should be noted that some authorities took decisions on a case-by-case basis and the table may therefore underestimate some local authorities' willingness to extend staying put to young people in particular placement types.

Table 2.2: Provision of staying put to young people in specific types of placements

| Local authority | LA L | LA M | LA N | LA P | LA Q |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Placement type | | | | | |
| Independent foster agency | X | X | X | X | X |
| Relative or friend | - | X | X | X | X |
| Children with disabilities below threshold for adult services | X | - | X | X | X |

As the table shows, all the in-depth pilot authorities were willing to arrange staying put placements for young people placed with independent foster agencies. However, as chapter seven explores in more detail, there were different expectations about the financial remuneration local authorities were willing to contribute to these placements once a young person reached 18; these decisions may influence foster carers willingness to extend placements in practice, potentially denying some young people the opportunity to stay by virtue of historic placement decisions taken by the authority.

Pilot authorities opted not to include young people with disabilities who were eligible for adult services within the pilot; to avoid duplicating existing provision. However, the majority offered staying put placements to young people with disabilities who were below the threshold for adult services. Focus groups with professionals for the Right2BCared4 pilot

¹³ Data were not supplied by LA R.

and interviews with staying put managers and those foster carers providing placements for these young people, highlighted their vulnerability and the importance of the pilot in addressing what they perceive to have been a gap in service provision.

People that have got difficulties – whether it be learning disabilities or... mental health, personality problems that either haven't been diagnosed... or... if they're not – this is gonna sound horrible this – if they're not bad enough, if they're not disabled enough they often fall to the back in terms of funding... they're not able to live in normal supported accommodation but because social services don't provide any care for them, but there's no funding for them to get the specialist support that they need. And that's the main gap [in service provision] that I've come across so far (leaving care personal adviser, LA Q).

In this context staying put may offer a bridge to independence for young people who may be especially vulnerable living independently at the age of 18 years.

Implications

The eligibility criteria local authorities adopt influence the number of young people who are entitled to remain living with their foster carers up to the age of 21 and therefore the potential additional demands on fostering services and the cost burden of the staying put programme. The parameters set by local authorities also determine whether or not young people have the opportunity to benefit from enhanced entitlements through the pilot. It is also noteworthy that the quality of past care planning will have a bearing upon young people's situations and whether or not they are entitled to stay and/or choose to do so. Analysis of the MIS data revealed that in practice the proportion of young people staying put in the 'hybrid' model (which is more flexible and therefore may increase the number of young people staying put) was similar to that in authorities operating the familial model: 25% (79) and 20% (62).

EET criteria that excludes young people who have emotional or behavioural difficulties or have disengaged from education may deny the young person the chance of a stable placement to support re-engagement in meaningful activity.

Messages for policy and practice

- The rigid application of eligibility criteria requiring young people to have an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carers and/or to be in EET may deny young people who would benefit from the programme (including those who have experienced relatively recent or multiple placement changes or breakdowns and may have more complex needs) the opportunity to stay.

- The MIS data revealed that removing the requirement to be a in a long-term foster placement, where young people have an ‘established familial relationship’ with their carer, does not lead to a significant rise in the numbers who remain in foster care beyond 18. On this basis local authorities could adopt a more flexible and needs led approach without bearing significant additional costs.
- Removing the requirement that young people have to remain with their existing foster carers would allow them to be active agents in the decision concerning when to make the transition from care to independence instead of imposing an ‘age related’ rather than ‘needs led’ transition upon them (see Munro *et al.*, 2011a for further discussion).

Chapter three: Staying put or leaving care? Factors influencing the decision-making process

Introduction

As the previous chapter illustrated the models of delivery of staying put implemented in each pilot authority serve to influence whether or not young people approaching 18 are eligible to remain in foster care into early adulthood. However, even when young people have a technical entitlement to stay this does not necessarily mean they will all be offered this opportunity. Foster carers may decide they are unwilling or unable to maintain young people's placements post 18 ('foster carer led opt out') and/or young people may decide they do not want to stay ('young person led opt out'). Data supplied by local authorities at an early stage in the implementation of the pilots¹⁴ revealed that 86% (78) of decisions not to stay put were 'young person led' and 14% (13) were 'foster carer led'. This chapter explores what influences both foster carers' and young people's decisions about staying put and the role that supervising social workers and leaving care personal advisers play in facilitating the decision-making process.

Factors influencing foster carers' willingness to continue to provide placements for young people post 18 years of age

Thirty one out of the 36 foster carers for whom in-depth qualitative data were available were willing to extend placements for the young people in their care into adulthood; 23 of these young people took up this offer. Four young people expressed a desire to remain with foster carers who were either unable or unwilling to offer or maintain staying put placements. In part, this may reflect the characteristics of the sample; the majority of young people were adolescent graduates who first entered care aged under 11 and have experienced long term foster placements. Consistent with this, analysis revealed that the most common explanation provided by foster carers for offering staying put placements was influenced by the strong attachment these carers had to the young people in their care. Fourteen carers highlighted that young people were 'part of their family' and the placements were young people's homes; indeed all but two of the carers, who explained their decision in these terms, had been caring for their foster children since they were between two and 14 years old. The foster carers' relationships with these young people were therefore influential in their decisions about offering staying put placements, as the following quotes illustrate:

¹⁴ These data were collected from pilot authorities in July 2010 to inform selection of the interview sample.

I love [young person], I really love him. And I can't imagine, I can't imagine ever saying, for any reason that [young person] had to go (foster carer, LA L. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 12).

Well, as far as we were concerned, you know, this is [their] home, you know, [they're] a part of a family, we didn't just view [foster child] as a foster child because, you know, when he came in... he just fitted in (foster carer, LA P. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 11).

Interviews with these foster carers also served to reiterate the fact that the young people placed with them were 'part of the family' and that in this context treating them differently by virtue of their care status was problematic.

Basically, they've grown up with my children... they're like brothers and sisters... it's more natural for them to move on like my own children do, because I've still got my daughter here at twenty one, so it would feel like we'd neglected [foster son] if he'd been pushed out... my personal view is that he's not ready to move on and look after himself (foster carer, LA Q. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 13).

These quotes and the sentiments expressed by these carers illustrate that a high proportion of carers acknowledged the importance of promoting young people's membership of the family and their role in helping those in their care to belong; this is important in developing a sense of permanence for young people in long-term foster care (Schofield, 2008; Schofield and Beek, 2009). The MIS data revealed that this view was not confined to carers offering lengthy placements (see appendix two).

Although the relationship between the young person and their carers was a key defining factor influencing decisions about whether or not to extend placements, analysis also revealed that a series of other considerations were influential. At least six foster carers emphasised that young people in the general population are not routinely expected to leave home when they reach legal adulthood and that normative transitions are more flexible and responsive to individual young people's needs and circumstances. As one staying put carer reflected:

How many families would go to their son and daughter at the age of eighteen and say, Well, 'bye, bye. We've done our job, now you've got to go'? (LA L. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 9).

It was also identified that young people are rarely practically and/or emotionally ready to leave at 18. Six carers also made reference to the fact that the young people in their care

were 'younger than their years' because of their pre-care experiences of abuse or neglect or due to specific health conditions. Age-related rather than needs led entitlements may render some young people particularly vulnerable. Foster carers argued that it was important to permit young people to remain in foster care until they were older, to help compensate for past trauma and to provide them with the opportunity to mature and develop their skills. For example, one foster carer outlined that:

I mean, he's seventeen but really, he's really, but, I would say he's between fourteen and fifteen [developmentally] which is probably when the trouble arose in his family... You wouldn't ask a fourteen or fifteen year old to live on their own, would you? (LA N. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 16).

Another explained:

We tried to discourage him [moving to independence] because he wasn't mature enough because one of the problems, I think, perhaps of his ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], I think his development was delayed. And so he wasn't really, although he was eighteen he was, you know, a lot, he was acting as a younger child (LA P. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 11).

Finally, at least five carers explicitly referred to the importance of continuity and stability to support young people's engagement in education.

We saw with [young person], she was, as she came up to eighteen, you could see it [leaving her placement at 18] was concerning her. It's enough that they've got to think about leaving college, going into university, but to have that added thing of where am I going to live? (LA N. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 14).

Such sentiments are consistent with research evidence that highlights that accelerated and compressed transitions, as young people in care try to navigate multiple changes in their lives and at a younger age than their peers in the general population, can leave them vulnerable to poor outcomes in relation to their education, health and wellbeing (Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Broad, 1998; Dixon and Stein, 2005; Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; Stein, 2004; Stein and Munro, 2008). Chapter five explores the contribution that staying put may make to addressing these issues and improving early outcomes, however, not all foster carers are willing or able to extend placements; the reasons for this are explored below.

Decisions not to extend placements beyond 18

It was relatively uncommon for foster carers to take the decision not to offer young people the opportunity to stay put. Local authorities identified 13 out of 91 cases within their cohorts. Amongst the interview sample there were five foster carers who opted out of the scheme and two cases where the local authority had made the decision not to keep a placement open¹⁵. In three cases young people's behaviour appeared to precipitate these decisions. In the first, the foster carer terminated the placement because it came to her attention that the young man in her care was still engaged in criminal activities, even though he had been warned that this would jeopardise his placement:

We can't trust him anymore really... You know, he weren't bothered, he were still going to carry on doing it [stealing], no matter what. So the social worker took him away. We said plus we don't want him to be here if we can't trust him and he needed a lesson, you know, to learn by it (LA R. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 16).

In the second case, the relationship between the carer and young person deteriorated. The young man revealed that he:

Didn't have that opportunity [to stay put] because they [his carers] said they only take up to 18, but I knew there was someone else who would have took me until I was old enough to leave (Michael. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 17).

The quote above reflects this young man's desire to move to an alternative foster placement. However, the familial model of staying put in operation in his authority meant he was denied the opportunity of an alternative foster placement until he reached 21. There is, however research evidence that suggests that high quality final placements can be therapeutic and assist young people to fulfil their potential, even when these commence late in a young person's care career (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Schofield, 2003; Schofield and Beek, 2009; Sinclair *et al.*, 2007).

In the third case, in which relationships difficulties between the carer and young person were implicated, the foster carer explained that:

We had a huge row... I just said, [young person], I'm not going through all this for the next year, I don't need to... You know, up to eighteen, I am paid to take some shit, but over eighteen, no, you're lucky that I'm extending it and if you can't respect and appreciate that,

¹⁵ It is important to note that this figure will be influenced by the eligibility criteria for staying put; young people with more complex needs may not be eligible to stay put because they have experienced multiple placement breakdowns and/or have not established a 'familial relationship' with a foster carer (see chapter six).

you need to think about moving on. Go somewhere else and see whether anybody else can tolerate your aggressive and judgemental attitude (LA L. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 15).

However, although the placement came to an end the carer has maintained contact with this young woman. This ongoing relationship is valued highly by this young person, who also acknowledged, in her interview, how challenging her behaviour had been at the time.

There were two cases in which carers expressed concerns about young people's engagement in developing the skills needed to live independently. One couple had clear expectations that their biological and foster children would be actively engaged in EET; the young man in their care decided not to comply with this. The foster carer suggested that '*he just wanted a go at sitting around doing a lot of nothing really*'. Another carer felt that the young man in her care expected her to continue to cook, clean and provide for him. She felt that this was denying him the opportunity to develop his independent living skills and therefore she decided not to offer him a staying put placement. This young man would have preferred to have stayed put as he did not feel ready for independence:

Young person: Well, I can't really say I had a decision to move.

Interviewer: No?

Young person: It was like I was getting told.

Interviewer: Who was it that you discussed it with?

Young person: Everyone... like them [carer] and the social workers. So it wasn't like I was discussing, it was like a one way thing ... I wasn't ready to move on.

Interviewer: No?

Young person: No.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Young person: I just wasn't ready for it, like... I wasn't ready to go and live on my own. I was still happy being at home [foster care placement], should I say (Christian. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 9).

In the final two cases the local authority took the decision not to extend placements. This included one young man who spent little time in his placement and the social worker struggled to justify the ongoing expenditure. However, the young man indicated that he would have valued the opportunity to stay.

The foster carer suggested that the local authority's position was:

Because he isn't sleeping here, the placement isn't being used. So it's not valid... They see it as an available bed. And so they will push him out, cut it off, put somebody else in.

Factors influencing young people's decisions to stay put

Young people gave a range of reasons for deciding to remain in foster care beyond 18 years of age. Consistent with the messages from foster carers, two factors were particularly influential. Firstly, young people's relationships with their carers and their sense of belonging in the family and secondly, the extent to which they felt practically and/or emotionally ready to make the transition from care to independence. Eight young people explicitly stated that feeling 'part of the family' influenced their decision to stay put; they also saw staying put as a natural progression. It was also apparent that a further six young people had a secure base in foster care which is likely to have contributed to their decision to stay. All but two of this group of young people had been placed with their carers since at least the age of 14 years. This sense of belonging was important to young people and, in conjunction with discussions with foster carers, influenced young people's decision to stay put, as one young man explained:

My [carer] had a bit of an influence on me. Yeah, she sort of sees me as one of the family (Kevin. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 12).

Another young woman explained:

I was really chuffed 'cos at 18, to know that, if that [staying put] wasn't there, I'd be living out on my own. I would have had an emotional breakdown (chuckling), I really would, 'cos I love the family environment (Michelle. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 14).

MIS data also reveal that decisions to stay put were not closely related to length of time that young people had spent with their current foster carers (see appendix two).

Young people's perceptions of their readiness to live independently also influenced their decisions. Seven expressed the fact that they did not feel emotionally ready for the transition to independence and/or lacked the practical life skills necessary. In this context the option to stay put was welcomed, as one young man stated:

I didn't want to go out into the big, wide world (chuckles). Erm, I don't know, preparing yourself for the big world (Sam. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 16).

The interview data also revealed cases where it was clear that foster carers and leaving care personal advisers had sensitised young people to the realities of living independently and

helped young people realise they might benefit from remaining in foster care for longer, as one young woman explained:

I actually wanted to leave (chuckles) and then they [carers] said to me, er, 'look, we don't think you're ready,' and then I was sort of a teenage like, I won't be able to prove it to you,' but, no, I really was not ready (chuckles) and I'm glad that they [carers] said, 'look, stay a little longer. Go back to college, do this...' but at the time you're thinking, 'I don't want to do this. Stop telling me what to do.' But I'm really glad I did [stay put] now because, no, I wasn't ready to move out. Like I didn't know washing and things like that: I was just, like, 'I can do it whenever' (chuckles). 'I can't be arsed with that.' But, no, they [carers] were going, like, 'do your washing, do your ironing, then go out,' and that's how I live now. I do all my stuff [chores], then I go out and I can do whatever (Kim. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 16).

Actively encouraging young people to stay in care for longer can influence the numbers choosing to postpone their transitions from care to independence and counteract perceptions amongst the care population that it is necessary to make the transition from care to independence at 16 or 17 because this is what young people have witnessed their care experienced peers doing (Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

While in the majority of cases positive relationships with carers and young people's acknowledgement that they were not necessarily ready to live on their own were the explanations provided for deciding to remain with their carers into early adulthood, in four cases young people's comments appear to illustrate that they felt that there were no other viable options available to them. For example, one young man explained:

I didn't really decide, I didn't... when I stayed put I was sort of in part-time education and full-time employment so I didn't really have anywhere else to go at that stage, so it was, like, stay at home or move out and try the best I can on my own, but it just seemed easier just to stay at home really (Warren, age of young person at placement with foster carers: 11).

Another highlighted the challenges of securing appropriate accommodation and said:

I didn't really want to stay put: it was just the fact there was nowhere for me to move into as soon as I turned 18. Cos I was independent I wanted to just move out straight away (Ellie, age of young person at placement with foster carers: 15).

However, a couple of these young people opted to stay put on a short term basis. This allowed them to move to independence at a more gradual pace; removal of the requirement

that they leave their placement before or on their 18th birthday meant that they had more time to source suitable accommodation and increased the control they had of the process.

Factors influencing young people's decisions not to stay put

The majority of young people who took the decision not to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 were given the option of staying put but made the decision to leave and move to independence. The most common explanations young people provided indicated that there were issues concerning their relationships with their carers or others in the placement, or that they simply wanted to be more independent. It was noteworthy that foster carers, some of whom had cared for these young people for lengthy periods and were strongly attached to them were not always aware of young people's feelings. For example one young man who made an unplanned transition to independence explained that:

I just needed to get out. Psychologically I couldn't hold out for much longer. There was chains on me and – not literally. Not so much overwhelmed, 'cos there weren't an overwhelming of anything really, it was just... I wasn't... there was no free opinion. I had to do everything by the foster mother's words. Literally, anything she went had to go. So... it was more of a... a community or, you know, and a pupil than a family (Mathew. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 7).

Two young people also described 'feeling like outsiders' in their placements. Another young woman said:

Well, staying put, it offered the chance at being independent, but it wasn't the kind of independence that I wanted. I wanted to be fully independent and, but with, like, support there if I needed it. So I made the decision to move out and move into shared accommodation (Amanda, age of young person at placement with foster carers: 15).

Her leaving care personal adviser echoed these sentiments and suggested that the young woman 'felt suffocated' and that 'the rules that were imposed on her placement when she first went there remained the same at eighteen, so she felt nothing ever changed and she had no leeway'. If young people are overprotected and denied opportunities to test boundaries, take risks and learn from them, they may leave care ill-equipped for independent living (Munro *et al.*, 2010b; Munro *et al.*, 2011a; Stein and Munro, 2008). Although the decisions above were primarily concerned with interactions between young people and their carers, in one or two cases other factors, including moving in with a partner, or moving to secure employment were identified by young people as the reasons they decided not to stay put.

Messages for policy and practice

- Young people in care may be least equipped to navigate the transition to independence at an earlier age than their peers in the general population. Looked after children's development may have been delayed due to damaging life experiences; there is a higher prevalence of psychosocial adversity and psychiatric disorders amongst this group compared to the general population (Ford *et al.*, 2007). Staying put offers them additional time and space to develop and mature in a nurturing and protective environment.
- A key factor influencing both foster carers decisions to extend placements and young people's willingness to stay put was the quality of these relationships and the extent to which secure attachments had been established. This highlights the importance of effective care planning and matching as a foundation for positive trajectories.

Chapter four: Staying put: contributing to providing young people with a secure base and nurturing attachments?

Introduction

A key objective of the staying put pilot is to enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their carers so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support. This chapter explores the extent to which young people were provided with a stable base in foster care and the bearing this has upon their decisions concerning the timing of transitions from care to independence. It also explores young people's wider networks of support and who they were able to turn to for advice and support both during their time in care and after they left.

Dimensions of a secure foster family base

The extent to which foster care offers a secure base for young people during adolescence and promotes secure attachment will have a bearing upon young people's development and their journeys to adulthood. Schofield and Beek (2009) propose that the following five dimensions offer a secure foster family base in adolescence:

- availability – helping young people to trust;
- sensitivity – helping young people to manage feelings and behaviour;
- acceptance – building young people's self-esteem;
- co-operation – helping young people to feel effective; and
- family membership – helping young people to belong.

They also highlight the inter-relationship between these different dimensions and the contribution they make to young people's security, resilience and fulfilment of potential (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Sinclair and colleagues' research (2007) also suggest that those for whom care offers a strong base are committed to their foster families, happy where they are, feel a sense of belonging and do not have conflicting loyalties, whereas those with a weak base are in placements that they cannot be expected to invest in either because they are short-term, or because of young people's attitude towards these placements. Reasons for reluctance to commit to and invest in placements may be connected to young people's acceptance of the need to be in care and their existing commitments (for example towards their birth family) or due to past loss, separation and placement breakdowns which may make young people wary and inclined towards self-reliance. The quality of foster carers and

their capacity to cope with young people's behaviour are also of central importance and influence whether or not young people are provided with a strong foundation to maximise opportunities for successful transitions from care to independence (Schofield, 2003; Sinclair *et al.*, 2007). Drawing on data from interviews with young people, foster carers and leaving care personal advisers and diagrammatic representations of young people's networks of support, analysis was undertaken to explore the extent to which staying put foster carers were providing sensitive and responsive care to meet the needs of young people and whether placements were offering them the 'felt security' that is so important to their sense of belonging and wellbeing (Cashmore and Paxman, 2006; Schofield, 2000; Schofield and Beek, 2009).

The relationship between a secure base in foster care and staying put

Table 4.1 outlines the extent to which different groups of young people, who were eligible for the staying put pilot, were provided with a secure base in their final care placements.

Relationships were classified as strong and secure if there was evidence from the young person that the relationship was beneficial and rewarding and interviews with foster carers and/or leaving care personal advisers provided examples of carers' sensitivity, warmth and affection. Foster care was judged to offer a weaker base if:

- young people expressed ambivalence about the placement or relationships with their foster carers or made an abrupt and unplanned transition from care;
- there was a lack of warmth and a sense of detachment in carers descriptions of the young people in their care; and/or
- leaving care personal advisers raised concerns about the placement and the extent to which it was meeting the young person's needs.

It is important to note that in some instances it was clear that 'weaker base' placements had offered continuous care and a secure base in the past. However, difficulties were apparent at this transitional developmental stage as young people and their carers had not necessarily been able to navigate changing relationships, expectations and the stress of renegotiating boundaries and expectations as young people approached adulthood. Reasons for this included the legacy of the past and previous hurt and rejection and issues concerning identity, separation and loss from birth family which on occasion resurfaced, heightening young people's desire to return to their birth family and increasing their ambivalence about remaining in foster care (Wade 2008; Munro *et al.*, 2011a)¹⁶.

¹⁶ Recent research shows that such issues tend to receive minimal attention in the pathway planning process (Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

Table 4.1: Care pathway based on Sinclair and colleagues' (2007) typology and according to whether or not young people stayed put

| Foster care provision | Stayed put | | Did not stay put | | Total |
|--|-----------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | Strong base | Weaker base | Strong base | Weaker base | |
| Care pathway based on Sinclair and colleagues' typology | | | | | |
| Adolescent graduates | 8 ¹⁷ | 3 | 1 ¹⁸ | 3 | 15 |
| Abused adolescents | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Adolescent entrants | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| UASC | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Unclassified | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| Total | 15 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 34 ¹⁹ |

The MIS data showed that 38% (30 out of 80) of adolescent graduates (under the age of 11 at first entry to care and still looked after) opted to stay put compared to 49% (47 out of 95) of abused adolescents and 33% (51 out of 154) of adolescent entrants. The qualitative findings offer an insight into the quality of relationships and reveal that the majority of young people (15 out of 18; 83%), judged to have a strong and secure base within their current foster placement, opted to stay put. The three young people who were judged to have a secure base in care who did not stay put entered their final care placements at 15,16 and 17 years of age and appeared to have benefitted from this. This included two young people with complex needs who were placed with specialist foster carers. None of these young people were given the opportunity to experience consistency and stability into early adulthood because their foster carers opted out of staying put. It is noteworthy that one of these young people would have valued the chance to stay for longer. The following sections of the report explore similarities and differences in the characteristics of young people and the bearing this had upon whether or not young people stayed put.

¹⁷ Includes two young people who first entered care in early childhood, were adopted, experienced an adoption breakdown and re-entered care aged 11+.

¹⁸ Young person first entered care in early childhood, was adopted, experienced an adoption breakdown and re-entered care aged 11+.

¹⁹ Data not available for two young people.

Adolescent graduates

Nine out of 15 (60%) adolescent graduates had a secure base in foster care; and all but one stayed put. The key characteristics of adolescent graduates who stayed put was that they identified themselves as part of the family. As one expressed:

They treat me as their granddaughter... the other foster children are like brothers and sisters to me (Charlotte, stayed put).

This young woman also highlighted the importance she placed upon going on holiday with her foster carers, rather than being expected to go into respite care. The interview with the foster carer explained that she perceived the fostering task as a:

Vocation... it's normal to me to treat these children as your own... she [foster daughter] is a family type individual who sort of needs reassurance that there are people around her (LA L).

This was also reflected in the interviews with the other foster carers in this group who demonstrated their love and commitment to those in their care. Indeed, all but two of this group (secure base, staying put) were aged 11 or below when they moved in with their current carers; over time trust had been built and work undertaken to respond to and assist young people to address past hurt and trauma.

The one young man who did not stay put but who was deemed to have a secure base in care was initially looked after in early childhood and had subsequently been adopted. Following an adoption breakdown during his teenage years he was re-admitted to care; he had only been placed with his current carer since the age of 15. He was not given the option of staying put although he said he would have welcomed the chance to do so.

Overall, the qualitative findings highlight that the majority of adolescent graduates who experience long term, stable and high quality foster care opted to stay put. This is further facilitated by the willingness of foster carers to maintain these placements into adulthood. The case study below is typical of young people in this group.

Layla

Adolescent graduate, secure base and stayed put

She is like a mother; she can tell when something is wrong. I don't need to say it she just knows (Layla).

Layla was placed with her current foster carer aged eight. She was hurt by the experience of separation from her birth mother and older siblings who remained at home. Initially she

was determined she would 'go home to live with mummy' but over time she recognised that her carers were able to offer her a standard of care that her mother could not. However, she has continued to struggle with being separated from her biological mother and the absence of a relationship with her father and this has affected her studies at various times.

The interview with Layla's foster carers revealed that they were sensitive and understanding about her desire to return home whilst also recognising the impact of the abuse and neglect she had experienced and the value of '*therapeutic work... providing long security, boundaries and rooting*'. They recognised that:

She's actually got a whole package of stuff that she's dealing with, you know. Abandonment, rejection, confusion... the mere fact that she can get an essay in and be happy doing the course she is doing is a huge bonus.

The data suggested that they consistently provided Layla with acceptance and had quietly but consistently supported and encouraged her to develop her skills and reach her potential.

However, not all young people spend such lengthy periods in care; other groups have different experiences that shape their willingness to settle in new homes as well as the likelihood that they stay put (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007).

Abused adolescents

Young people who become looked after in adolescence following abuse and neglect tend to have experienced repeated rejection and trauma. They tend to have more complex needs and behavioural difficulties than adolescent graduates. Their age at entry also limits the scope for the care system to offer long term stability and a family for life; instead the system needs to offer a 'launch pad' for independence (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007). Analysis of the small sample of cases in the in-depth sample revealed that the extent to which this was achieved was influenced both by the quality of care available and young people's capacity to accept this care.

Table 4.1, above shows that four out of six of the abused adolescents had a secure base in care and all but one of these young people stayed put. Kirsten, whose case is outlined below, was not permitted to stay put but did benefit from the time she spent in the care of the local authority.

Kristen

Abused adolescent, secure base and did not stay put ('foster care led opt out')

I stayed with [foster carer] for three years...which is the longest I've ever stayed in a foster placement, and settled... she was single, on her own, and she had a daughter... she treated us the same (Kristen).

Kristen became looked after aged 11 having experienced longstanding neglect due to her mother's alcoholism. She explained that she '*moved about 20 times in different foster placements*' and that she '*couldn't settle really and wasn't very emotionally stable*'. Aged 15 she was placed with a specialist carer, a placement which lasted for three years, until she reached 18. Managing her emotions and behaviour was a challenge for her foster carer who described her as '*angry with the world*' and Kirsten acknowledged her carer's persistence even when she was '*being really horrible*'. The interview with Kirsten's foster carer also revealed her strong commitment to helping Kirsten resolve the '*internal constant panic she was in*' and supporting her by proactively sourcing appropriate therapeutic help for her. Kirsten credited her as:

The one who had the qualities that I needed at the time, so she kind of had, kind of resolved some of the issues and the feelings that I had about my mum and things like that, so she had, she had what I needed at the time.

As she approached 18, however, the foster carer felt Kirsten started to '*detach from the placement*' because she was '*fighting to be independent*'. On this basis she decided not to offer her a staying put placement but the work that was undertaken in the preceding three years provided a foundation to promote her future wellbeing.

Although Kirsten had a secure base in care this was time limited by virtue of her foster carer's decision. In contrast, there were two young people amongst the abused adolescents (who were placed with their current carers aged 14+) who made a pragmatic decision to stay put for six and seven months even though data suggested that there were concerns about their foster carers' capacity to meet these young people's needs. Staying put did, however, allow these young people to make 'young person led' rather than 'age related' transitions and gave them greater control of the decision making process.

Adolescent entrants

Adolescent entrants are admitted to care for reasons other than abuse and neglect; often as a result of challenging behaviour and problems at school (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007). Their behaviour, coupled with relatively late admission to care, can make it difficult for young people and/or foster carers to commit to sustaining these placements. Only three of the in-

depth sample were classified as adolescent entrants. In the first case (outlined below) Amanda struggled to commit to the placement; she did not perceive herself to be close to her foster carers and was not inclined to turn to them if she needed support. Therefore, she opted to make the transition from care to independence at 18. In the second, a young man was not permitted to stay put because of his offending behaviour ('foster carer led opt out'). In the third case the local authority refused to fund a staying put placement as the young man had only been with his current carers for two months; his former carers, with whom he had lived for two years, could no longer care for him as they were in the process of separating. The leaving care personal adviser described this as a resource driven rather than needs led decision. This latter case also illustrates how unexpected changes in carers' circumstances can rapidly alter young people's placement options as they approach adulthood. It also illustrates how the application of strict eligibility criteria can deny young people the chance to participate in decisions about the timing of their transition and restrict their choice of accommodation. Although the sample size is too low to draw definite conclusions, the pathways of the adolescent entrants highlight the importance of and need for alternative provision and support to maximise opportunities for these young people to make successful transitions from care to independence.

Amanda

Adolescent entrant, weaker base, did not stay put (young person led opt out)

She voted with her feet really, she wanted out quite quickly... (leaving care personal adviser).

Amanda lived with her father from the age of eight. When her father got a new partner relations deteriorated and she was placed in care when she was 15. Her foster carers perceived that she '*always wanted to go back to her dad*' and that this '*desperate desire to be with her family*' precipitated her abrupt transition. However, there was no evidence to suggest that they sought to help support Amanda to navigate emotions associated with this separation and loss. It was also suggested that the rules imposed on Amanda did not necessarily reflect her age and maturity and that she felt she had '*no leeway*'.

Amanda moved from her foster carers to her aunt's home. Since then she has experienced a number of changes in accommodation and a period of sofa surfing. She has not been in touch with her former foster carers although they have '*contacted her... and she knows where we are if she wants to visit*'.

As these case examples illustrate young people in and leaving care are not a homogenous group; their experiences and subsequent decisions and pathways are shaped by their pre-

care experiences as well as the quality of care planning, skills and attributes of foster carers and the goodness of fit between the young person and carers. Although the findings are based on small samples they are consistent with wider literature on placement stability and young people making the transition from care to independence (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Stein, 2004; Stein and Munro, 2008). The next section of this chapter explores how young people rate their relationships with key people in their lives and the support available to help them navigate the transition from care to independence.

Relationships and networks of support

Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) highlight the contribution that social networks play in promoting resilience and coping as young people negotiate the transition from adolescence to early adulthood. To facilitate exploration of the networks of support available to young people, each of the interviewees was asked to think about the people they were close to, those who choose to help them, those whose job it was to support them and those who they were not close to and then place these people in a circles diagram to help the research team understand how they felt about these relationships and which were most significant and/or important to them (see appendix three for further details). These diagrams, alongside interview data provide an insight into young people’s perceptions of the quality of their relationships with key figures in their lives and the networks of support available to them.

Table 4.2 shows how many young people indicated they were close or very close to birth parents, foster carers, friends, partners and leaving care personal advisers.

Table 4.2: Young people’s ratings of the closeness of their relationships

| | Stayed put (n=19) | | Did not stay put (n=11) | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | Very close or quite close relationships | Not close or not so close relationships | Very close or quite close relationships | Not close or not so close relationships |
| Foster carers | 16 (84%) | 3 (16%) | 4 (36%) | 7 (64%) |
| Birth parents | 11 (58%) | 8 (42%) | 8 (73%) | 3 (27%) |
| 'Best' friends and friends | 11 (58%) | 8 (42%) | 7 (64%) | 4 (36%) |
| Partners | 5 (26%) | 14 (74%) ²⁰ | 5 (45%) | 6 (55%) ²¹ |
| Leaving care personal advisers | 9 (47%) | 10 (53%) | 3 (27%) | 8 (73%) |

²⁰ Only one young person classified their relationship with their partner as 'not close'. In the remaining cases no rating was given suggesting that young people were single.

²¹ Only one young person classified their relationship with their partner as 'not close'. In the remaining cases no rating was given suggesting that young people were single.

Relationships with foster carers

As Table 4.2 shows, the majority of young people who stayed put were either very close or quite close to their foster carers and would turn to them for help and support. Sixteen out of 19 (84%) of the young people who stayed put reported being very or quite close to their carers (13 and three out of 19 respectively). This was also reflected in their interview accounts which demonstrated that they felt part of the family and thought of their carers as 'mum and dad'.

I think I've got a perfect relationship with them: it's like my own mum and dad now, like they are my family now. They took me in and treated me like one of their own (Elizabeth. Stayed put. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 12).

They're more family than my real family... And they do actually see us as their own children (Catherine. Stayed put. Age of young person at placement with foster carers: 12).

In contrast, 10 young people reported that they were not close or not so close to their foster carers at the time they were interviewed. All but one of these young people moved into their final placement aged 15 or above; only three stayed put. The three that stayed put chose to do so for a short period of time (between two weeks and eight months). They revealed that they had had a good relationship with their carers when they were looked after, but since they had left other members of their social network were their main source of support; relationships with foster carers had not endured. Others, however, had not felt they 'belonged' in their foster homes. For example, one young man said that leaving care had improved his self-confidence because he felt like an 'outsider' in his foster family. Another reported that he had no autonomy or control over his life while he was in foster care. He had not been able to articulate these feelings to his foster carers and instead opted to make an abrupt transition from care to independence. In such circumstances alternative sources of support may be particularly important.

Relationships with birth parents

Overall, a higher proportion of those who did not stay put reported having quite close or very close relationships with birth parents than their counterparts who stayed put. All but three young people who did not stay put reported that these relationships were very close or quite close (eight out of 11 (73%) compared to 11 out of 19 (58%) of those stayed put). However, interviews with leaving care personal advisers and foster carers revealed that some young people appeared to have been overly optimistic about how much they could rely on their birth parents; while some relationships were perceived by foster carers or leaving care personal advisers as beneficial and supportive, others were viewed as detrimental to young

people's wellbeing (see also Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Dixon and Stein, 2005; Stein, 2004; Wade, 2008).

Five young people returned to live with their birth families at 18 or shortly afterwards; three of these young people moved in with their birth parents rather than staying put and two made the transition having stayed put for two and 12 months. Two out of the three that decided not to stay put indicated that they were not close to their foster carers, whereas those that stayed put in the first instance reported having good relationships with their carers and reported that they were extremely supportive. Young people could feel torn between remaining with foster carers to whom they were securely attached and returning to live with their birth families. David explained that:

Having stayed put I realised I should have been back with my mum.

He also highlighted the importance of living in the same geographical area as the rest of his birth family.

I wanted to be real close to them so that's why I left... I was in [area], I know it's train distance, but I just needed to be in the family environment. Do you know what I mean, in the town.

Whereas, Tim felt it was time to 'move on' from care.

I think I went [from the staying put placement] a little bit earlier than I thought I would. Erm... I don't know why, it was kind of a gut feeling to leave when I did. Erm... I did want to stay a bit longer because it was good, I liked them, but I just had to move on.

His former carers revealed that his birth mother had expected him to return home at 18 and that she had reacted badly when he chose to stay put:

She didn't really speak to [foster child] for a while. She made him feel so guilty.

They also highlighted that before Tim reached 18 he had minimal contact with his mother. This then increased post 18 but the foster carers felt that he found the responsibility of managing this contact and his birth mother's expectations challenging. It was also clear that two other young people in the interview sample were expected to return home although foster carers and/or leaving care personal advisers did not perceive this to be in these young people's best interests. Conflicting loyalties can lead young people to be indecisive about where they want to live; some distance themselves from their foster carers or make abrupt transitions from care as a result. However, it is noteworthy that only one of the five cases where young people returned to family proved sustainable; four young people moved to

alternative accommodation relatively quickly. Management of such issues can be difficult for young people and foster carers and it is important that both parties are supported to navigate issues concerning birth family relationships. However, data from the Right2BCared4 evaluation revealed that such issues receive minimal attention in the pathway planning process (Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

Professional support from leaving care personal advisers

A higher proportion of young people who stayed put reported that they were quite close or very close to their leaving care personal advisers compared to those who did not stay put; nine out of 19 (47%) and three out of 11 (27%) respectively. Interview data revealed that the vast majority of young people were positive about their leaving care personal advisers and the support they received (27 out of 32; 84%), although those who stayed put were slightly more positive than those who did not (19 out of 21 of those that stayed put compared to eight out of 11 of those who did not stay put). Findings from the Right2BCared4 evaluation also demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with the support that leaving care personal advisers provide (Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

At least five young people suggested that they had really good relationships with their leaving care personal advisers describing them as caring, approachable, understanding and aware of their background and needs:

If she comes into the house, she doesn't have to ask what's up, she kind of has an idea and she'll say... She's like a, kind of a best friend type of thing (Emma, did not stay put).

I can relate to her as well... Yeah, 'cos there's no judging. With a lot of my friends they tend to judge, so... But she not like most care workers, where they're all, like, feeling sorry for you and... 'oh, you'll be fine'. She knows who I am, you know. If I'm down in the dumps but for a stupid reason, she'll give me a kick up the butt and just say... 'go on, get a grip'. But she's very caring as well (Mathew, did not stay put).

One young man who had not stayed put held his leaving care personal adviser in particularly high regard and explained how supportive she had been since he had left care:

She's been, she's been there for me since I've left care, so she... she helps me out a lot... a lot more than my foster parents or my sisters have (Michael, did not stay put).

The majority (27) of young people also reported that their leaving care personal advisers were available when they needed them and kept in touch. However, a small number were not happy about the level of support they received and/or the availability and responsiveness of leaving care personal advisers. For example, one young person reported:

She hasn't really been around much. I'm coping well enough on my own, but it's, yeah, it'd be nice to catch up some time and for [leaving care personal adviser] to take an interest (Kevin, stayed put).

Another indicated that:

You ask them to do something and it takes absolutely forever to get an answer or whatever. And they never answer their phones (Emma, did not stay put).

The absence of a timely response from professionals can be particularly distressing when young people have moved to independence and they experience challenging life events, as the following quote illustrates:

I can talk to her and everything but... I don't know, like sometimes when I'm in a really bad situation, like when I got kicked out of my girlfriend's and everything, and didn't know what to do, she didn't get in contact with me for a month and a half, even though I'd, like texted her and tried to call her and everything. She seems to have, like, more time off than she is working (Robert, did not stay put).

Wider research also reveals that care leavers sometimes feel that they are left to 'fend for themselves' when they move to independence and that support is limited to working hours and then only if someone is available to help (Morgan and Lindsay, 2006; Ridge and Millar, 2000). The absence of professional support may also be more acutely felt by those young people who lack effective networks of support.

Networks of support

Analysis of young people's support networks revealed a mixed picture concerning the number of people young people felt were important in their lives. Table 4.3 below provides a summary of the number of people young people specifically identified that they were very close or quite close to and to whom they would be likely to turn to for advice and support. This reveals that young people who were in ongoing staying put placements had more extensive networks of support available to them than young people who had already made the transition to independence. Six out of 12 (50%) young people who remained in staying put placements had a network of five or more people that they reported being quite close or very close to, compared to only one care leaver. These more extensive networks (five plus people) typically comprised of foster carers, birth parents and/or extended birth family members, leaving care personal advisers and friends.

Table 4.3: Networks of support according whether young people were still in their staying put placement or had made the transition to independence

| Number of people young people reported being 'quite close' or 'very close' to | Young people in ongoing staying put placements (n=12) | Young people who have made the transition to independence ²² (n=18) | Total |
|---|---|--|-------------------------|
| 1 | 0 (0%) | 3 (17%) | 3 (10%) |
| 2 | 3 (25%) | 2 (11%) | 5 (17%) |
| 3 | 2 (17%) | 10 (56%) | 12 (40%) |
| 4 | 1 (8%) | 2 (11%) | 3 (10%) |
| 5 | 3 (25%) | 1 (6%) | 4 (13%) |
| 6 | 2 (17%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (7%) |
| 7 | 1 (8%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) |
| Total | 12 (100%) | 18 (100%) | 30 ²³ (100%) |

The data suggest that once young people make the transition to independence their support networks tend to contract; this is of concern given the psychological challenges associated with making the transition from care to independence. Three young people only included one relationship in their diagrammatic representation of their support networks. In two instances these young people identified being very close to their former foster carers and the third identified their birth mother as their only source of support. In addition, there were two young people who had not stayed put who were not 'very close' to anyone; suggesting both isolation and self-reliance.

The majority (10 out of 18; 56%) of care leavers had a network of three people. The network data also revealed that those who had made the transition from care to independence were more likely than the staying put sample to identify birth parents and partners in their networks. The findings also revealed that 19 young people continued to rely on former foster carers. However, seven did not identify them within their networks at all even though five had spent two or more years with the same carer. This raises a question as to whether more could be done to try to promote informal and ongoing contact between former looked after children and their foster carers, particularly given the evidence that at this critical transitional stage support networks appear to be rather limited (National Care Advisory Service, 2012).

²² This cohort includes seven young people who stayed put but had made the transition to independence at the point of their interview as well as the not staying put sample.

²³ Two young people that were interviewed did not complete a diagram to show their networks of support.

Messages for policy and practice

- Findings highlight how children's social care decisions concerning entry into care as well as the quality of subsequent care planning and foster placements influence both who is permitted to stay put and who chooses to do so.
- Contrary to negative media coverage and public and professional portrayals of the care systems, findings from the study highlight that many foster families offer a warm, nurturing environment, compensatory care and a secure base for adolescent graduates. Equally, it can offer a positive 'launch pad' to adulthood for later entrants. When this is achieved young people are more likely to stay put.
- Support networks play a part in promoting resilience and assist young people to cope with change. Findings reveal that young people's support networks contract when they make the transition from care to independence. The peer researchers proposed that local authorities should be more proactive in encouraging foster carers to remain in contact with and offer ongoing support to former looked after children. The majority of foster carers were happy for young people to stay in touch, but often expected those who had been in their care to get in touch with them rather than approach the young people themselves and make contact. Given past hurt and rejection young people may not feel entitled or able to do this. This raises questions about what more could be done to support the continuation of positive and supportive relationships.
- Increased contact with, or return to birth family in early adulthood is not uncommon. Foster carers expressed some concerns that young people were sometimes ill-equipped to manage these relationships; while for some young people they may be beneficial and supportive, for other they may be detrimental (Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Dixon and Stein, 2005; Munro *et al.*, 2011a; Stein, 2004; Wade, 2008). It is important that social workers and leaving care workers are proactive in exploring family and social relationships, managing young people's expectations, and preparing them for renewed or increased contact.

Chapter five: Experiences and impact of staying put

...the opportunity to stay for an extra... one, two or three years... can make all the difference between someone's success in moving into independence or not (leaving care personal adviser).

Introduction

Staying put offers young people in foster care the chance to remain in a supportive and protective environment for longer. This presents young people in the pilot with a new opportunity which has the potential to promote positive outcomes. Gilligan (2009) in an exploration of positive turning points and foundations for change suggests that '*opportunity represents a favourable conjuncture of processes and context whose potential long term value remains yet to be harvested and supported*' (p.27). Young people's '*readiness*' to respond to an opportunity, proactive engagement and a '*sustaining context*' will influence the contribution that the opportunity makes to young people's trajectories (Gilligan, 2009). This chapter examines the experiences of young people who decided that they would benefit from remaining in foster care for longer and considers their reasons for staying, as well as their perspectives of the impact that this opportunity has had on them. It also examines the perspectives of foster carers and those leaving care on the role and impact of staying put. Drawing on MIS data the impact of staying put on young people's educational trajectories is also examined.

Young people's perspectives on the benefits of staying put

At the time of the interviews, 14 young people were in ongoing staying put placements, having spent between six months and three years with their foster carers. Nine young people had made the transition to independence, having stayed put for between two weeks and two years. Two young women planned to stay put temporarily; one stayed for just two weeks after her 18th birthday as her new accommodation was not immediately available; the other young woman stayed for seven months. In both situations staying put allowed them greater control of the timing of their transitions, which they welcomed. Two young men decided to leave their staying put placements to move in with their birth parents after six months and one year.

Two young women made the decision to move in with their partners, having spent an additional two years in foster care. Two young men chose to move to independence within eight and nine months of staying put, after apparently becoming involved with '*bad crowd[s]*'.

Finally, one young woman moved into a two bed roomed house, near her carer's home, with her daughter, having stayed put for 18 months.

Both those who had made the transition from care to independence and those who were still living with their foster carers outlined a number of benefits of the staying put programme. It enabled young people to maintain relationships with key figures in their lives. Sixteen young people spoke of supportive relationships with their carers; such relationships can offer a channel for the transmission of positive expectations and encouragement so that young people can succeed (Gilligan, 2009). The terminology young people used also highlighted the importance they attached to not being '*pushed*', '*forced*' or '*kicked out*' of care and how they welcomed having a '*choice*' about when they left. As one explained:

Because I've been able to stay put, by the time I move on it will be more of a choice that I've made because I know I'm ready, rather than being forced to, which I wasn't ready to do at 18. It's made a massive difference in the sense that I know, that when I do move out, I will be able to cope (Layla).

Involvement in decisions concerning when to make the transition from foster care to independence may be particularly significant for young people whose lives have been characterised by separation, loss and placement changes over which they have had minimal or no control (Munro and Hardy, 2006; Ward and Skuse, 2003). Seven young people also acknowledged that they simply were not ready to leave at 18. For example, one young person reflected:

I suppose, like, I thought, I am no way ready to move into independence, and my foster carers agreed with me on that (Michelle).

Remaining in foster care into early adulthood therefore allowed young people time to mature and develop, as one young person outlined:

I think it made a hell of a difference: it was, yeah, it was really good, purely because it doesn't throw you in at the deep end, it's sort of like a sort of approach to being an adult. It was good (Tim).

Practical benefits were also acknowledged by around 12 young people. In particular, young people highlighted the financial benefits of remaining with their foster carers and the expense of independent living; anxiety around financial management was also apparent (see Munro *et al.*, 2011a; Edwards, 2011). They also acknowledged that staying put offered them a framework to facilitate their continuation in education (see below for a discussion on EET).

When asked what advice they would give other young people, a clear message was to seriously consider staying put. Their responses illustrated an understanding that as young people approach legal adulthood they may be drawn to the idea of 'being independent' but that their own or their peers' experiences have taught them that in practice making the transition from care to independence before you are equipped and ready can be detrimental.

Stay put, because it has just given me that much more support before you move out... Like, without that I really would have felt that I would have gone under; I think I would have crashed and burned (Michelle).

I've seen other cases of people who moved out early, who've moved out earlier and, erm, most of them actually didn't know what they had until they lost it... There have been people who've been, like, messed up, who messed up at it because they moved out too early (Kevin).

Professional perspectives

Young people's sentiments were also echoed by foster carers and leaving care personal advisers. As chapter three outlined, the majority of foster carers who were interviewed felt that it was important not to 'push people out of home' at 18 on the basis that they are:

- part of the family and other members of the family are able to stay beyond 18 (*'every single child should have the opportunity to stay till they're... twenty one... I don't know, my sons left home at twenty four'*) (foster care LA L);
- The trauma that care experienced young people have suffered in childhood often renders them particularly vulnerable and means that it may take longer for them to reach a stage where they are prepared and developmentally ready to leave (*'she's a bit more damaged, you know, but we don't make too heavy weather of that'* (foster carer, LA L).

Further, a recurring theme in interviews with these professionals and staying put managers was the importance of continuity and stability to allow young people to navigate changes in their lives (living alone, maintaining a tenancy, managing finances and household tasks, securing employment or changing courses) sequentially rather than expecting young people to navigate multiple changes simultaneously. Denying young people the psychological space to negotiate changes of circumstance gradually, which is how most young people cope during transition, can present young people with considerable challenges (Coleman and Hendry, 1999; Stein and Munro, 2008). As one leaving care personal adviser reflected:

It just seems silly that the minute they're eighteen, that you have to close the placement and find them somewhere else to live which isn't always easy when they turn eighteen, and it just gives them that stability and gives them that extra time to develop their independence skills and access sort of education and things like that really... Because a lot of, it's like, literally like the day they turn eighteen, they have to click and the, they're an adult and then they get kicked out of their foster placement and it's all quite scary for them and it [staying put] just helps them adjust to things, I think, as well (LA M).

The vast majority of leaving care personal advisers, staying put managers and foster carers also welcomed the greater flexibility that staying put offers with regards to the timing of young people's transitions from care to independence.

So many foster children have had very broken upbringings... and for these children... it takes a long time for them to settle... they finally find that place where they can settle and all of a sudden they feel like they have to move out (foster carer, LA L).

If she was pushed out, to use that expression... I think it would [have been] a tremendous shock to her, and I think that she might well have become quite depressed... (foster carer, LA L).

A number of foster carers who had maintained placements post 18 also felt that staying put had protected those in their care from adverse outcomes. Without this some carers felt that young people's circumstances would have deteriorated and that their pathways would have been mired by isolation and/or poor housing conditions, debt, drugs or crime. For example, one carer suggested that if her foster son had left at 18 then she thinks he would have:

Fallen apart because he didn't really have a safety net or other network. So, he'd have been plonked somewhere, [getting drawn into] crime, dabbling in drug use (LA N).

This can also be understood with reference to this young man's care history. Data suggests that his long term foster placement, which began when he was aged eight, had failed to meet his needs. At 16 the young man was placed with his current foster carers who had provided therapeutic care and allowed the young person to 'leapfrog developmentally'. Without ongoing support and the space to thrive in a family environment the carers feared this young man's wellbeing would have deteriorated. In another example a foster mother envisaged that an abrupt transition to independence for their foster son (an abused adolescent entrant to care) would initiate a downward spiral and poor outcomes:

He would have probably gone into a bedsit... Then wouldn't have been able to cope with money... then eventually quit college... Ended up in a dead end job. And then probably ended up going back [to the birth family] home... [and into] the lion's den (foster carer, LA Q).

While some foster carers identified how staying put minimises the risk of poor outcomes at least six highlighted how staying put promotes positive trajectories; providing young people with additional time and 'space to grow up', mature and develop the skills needed to succeed in independence. Maintaining foster placements post 18 was frequently identified by carers and leaving care personal advisers as important to support educational achievement. Two young people in the interview sample were attending university²⁴. Both their foster carers indicated that staying put had been beneficial because it offered these young people stability and continuity of care while they were navigating the transition from college to university. Ongoing placements were also seen to allow young people to 'concentrate a hundred percent on their studies'. As one foster carer explained:

I think she saw that she got the best of both worlds, she got the education she wanted but she also had the home and the security, and the freedom to abuse it like lots of teenagers do (foster carer, LA L).

This carer also felt that in the absence of staying put this young woman would have struggled because she found her first year at university challenging; without ongoing support she might have 'been one of the kids [who became] angry and left, and got into the wrong kind of company'. A small number of foster carers also felt that the requirement to be in EET to stay put in their authority, coupled with their belief in the importance of promoting this pathway, had meant young people who might otherwise have disengaged from education persevered instead:

He stuck with it because he said he didn't want to lose staying here (foster carer, LA N).

And I think that, in my opinion, if he, because of the situations with his personal life at home, I think, if he hadn't stayed here, I think he probably wouldn't have ended up finishing the college courses that he's sort of on (foster carer, LA Q).

Education, training and employment

Pre-care and in-care experiences can influence young people's educational pathways and subsequent life chances (Stein and Munro, 2008). Compared to their peers in the general population, care leavers have poor educational outcomes. In 2010, 62% (3,860) of care leavers were in EET at 19 (Department for Education, 2010); compared to 88% (592, 300) of

²⁴ Another was taking a gap year before starting her degree.

young people in the general population at 18²⁵ (Department for Education, 2011). However, there is increasing recognition in policy and practice that it is important that foster carers, leaving care personal advisers and others have high aspirations for those in their care and that they receive help and support to achieve their potential (Berridge, 2007; Children Act 2004; Children and Young Persons Act, 2008; Francis 2000 cited in Tilbury, Buys and Creed, 2009; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Tilbury *et al.*, 2009; Stein, 2004; Munro and Stein, 2008). Research demonstrates that 'ingredients for success include settled care and post care careers and sound carer planning'. There is also 'value in delaying young people's transitions from care' (Wade and Dixon, 2006, p119; Stein and Munro, 2008). In this context staying put has the potential to improve education, training and employment outcomes; and one of the central objectives of staying put is to provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in this regard.

Analysis was undertaken to explore variations in activity at 19 according to whether or not young people stayed put. Data on all former relevant young people from the pilot local authorities that supplied MIS data are presented in appendix four. To facilitate exploration of similarities and differences in EET status data on the circumstances of young people in or leaving foster care (rather than other placement types) were examined²⁶. As table 5.1 shows young people who stayed put were more than twice as likely to be in full time education at 19 compared to their counterparts who did not stay put (55% and 22% respectively)²⁷. Twelve percent of those that stayed put were in higher education compared to 5% of those that did not stay put. In addition a slightly higher percentage of those who stayed put were in full time training and employment at 19 compared to those that did not stay put (25% and 22% respectively). This may simply reflect the EET criteria that pilot authorities introduced; most required young people to be in EET to be permitted to stay put. However, it remains the case that 40% of young people who made the transition to independence at 18 were NEET for 'other circumstances' (i.e. not due to illness or disability) a year after they left care even though their past life circumstances were broadly comparable to young people who stayed put (<0.01, significant). The qualitative data reveals that young people's support networks

²⁵ EET data at 19 are not available for those in the general population.

²⁶ Age at entry into care and length of last foster placement were similar for those that stayed put and those that did not. However, those that stayed put were slightly more likely to have entered care due to abuse and neglect (53% (70) of those that stayed put compared to 37% (78) of those that did not, although this failed to reach significance). Details on whether the sample had emotional and behavioural difficulties, disabilities or special education needs were not available and therefore it was not possible to make comparisons which took these factors into account.

²⁷ Data from MIS were not available to determine which of the staying put cohort had made the transition from care to adulthood by the age of 19. Amongst the interview sample, nine young people out of the 23 that had stayed put had moved to independence during interviews. Length of stay varied from two weeks to two years. The 14 in ongoing staying put placements had remained with their carers for between six months and three years since their 18th birthday.

tend to contract when they make the transition from care to independence; this may deny them consistent support, encouragement and guidance to assist them to succeed in EET (Tilbury *et al.*, 2009; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Eight of the interview sample who stayed put identified that having done so was beneficial to their education and one of the reasons cited related to the interest foster carers showed in this aspect of young people's lives. As one young man reflected:

If you are going to college I think it's a lot better if you come home and you, like, the person asks, 'Oh, how has your day been?' or whatever (Alex).

Interview data

Data from the interviews revealed that at 18 years the majority of young people were in EET (31; 86%). Four (11%) were not in EET and the EET status of one young person was not known. A slightly higher percentage of those that stayed put were in EET (21 out of 23; 91.3%) compared to those that did not (10 out of 13; 77%). Analysis was also undertaken to explore changes in EET status. At the point of interview young people were aged between 18 and 21 years. Twenty three were in EET at both data collection points; this included 11 who remained in education, four who remained in employment throughout and eight who moved between education and employment.

Table 5.1: Activity at 19 according to whether or not young people stayed put (young people in or leaving foster care)

| Full time education | | | Part time education other than HE | | | Full time training or employment | | | Part time training or employment | | | NEET due to illness of disability | | | NEET because of other circumstances | | |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| SP | NSP | All | SP | NSP | All | SP | NSP | All | SP | NSP | All | SP | NSP | All | SP | NSP | All |
| 55% (42) | 22% (28) | 34% (70) | 4% (3) | 2% (3) | 3% (6) | 25% (19) | 22% (28) | 23% (48) | 5% (4) | 10% (13) | 8% (17) | 1% (1) | 4% (5) | 3% (6) | 9% (7) | 40% (52) | 29% (59) |

Table 5.2: Changes in education, training and employment status amongst the interview sample

| Education, training and employment status at 18 (EET) | Education, training and employment status at interview (EET) (young people aged 18 –21) | | | | | | | | Total | | |
|---|---|-----|------------|-----|------------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| | Education | | Employment | | Not in EET | | Not known | | | | |
| | SP | NSP | SP | NSP | SP | NSP | SP | NSP | SP | NSP | All |
| Education | 9 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 17 | 8 | 25 |
| Employment | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| Not EET | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Not known | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 9 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 13 | 36 |

The level and types of educational qualifications undertaken varied. Most had not yet progressed to the level of education that might be expected of their age group, i.e. higher education. Interviews revealed that in at least four cases pre and in-care experience had impacted on young people's school attendance and educational achievements. Seven young people also had a learning disability or health needs that affected their education.

Twenty three of the 25 in education had enrolled on courses in further education (with the remaining two entering higher education). The majority (18; 78%) had gone on to undertake vocational courses (e.g. NVQs and BTECHs) rather than 'A' levels (4; 17%)²⁸. Although vocational qualifications are intended to be equivalent to 'A' levels, Newby (2004) found that a lower proportion of those with vocational qualifications go on to university compared to young people with 'A' levels (cited in Jackson *et al.*, 2005). Jackson and colleagues (2005) recommended social workers make young people aware of this when discussing what they are intending to do after further education.

Two young people were attending university and one had enrolled for the following year. A further nine, six of whom had stayed put, aspired to go on to university in the near or distant future although only three (33%) of these had taken A levels. Overall, the majority of young people were working towards obtaining qualifications that they hoped would help them into employment or higher education. However, three appeared to enrol on numerous courses with no clear rationale as to why, or any indication of how their qualifications would be used in the future. There were also two examples of young people staying in education because they had to do so to stay put. This was not always perceived to be in these young people's best interests. For example, one leaving care personal adviser explained that:

Prior to September of 2010 he was on entry level courses, which are courses specifically for young people with learning difficulties. So the fact that he made that big jump into what's a mainstream course is huge, really. And the carers have always known that, you know, the funding of his placement is dependent on him being in education largely, so there was an incentive really for them to ensure he maintained his education. But with the comments he made at Christmas, you know, about struggling and not being very happy on the course it does make me wonder if, you know, if he did feel that it was expected of him that he, he'd go on and do this course that the college were offering (LA L).

The leaving care worker went on to say that the course was too difficult for this young man's abilities and as such it was detrimental to his well-being:

²⁸ One young woman was retaking her GCSEs.

There is a potential that we've, we've pushed him too, too much. And actually that could be ultimately detrimental to his self-esteem really.

This reinforces the importance of ensuring that the EET young people are engaged in aligns with their skills, abilities and aspirations. It also highlights how some young people's options may be constrained by strict EET eligibility criteria for staying put; they may feel that they have to enrol or remain on courses that they feel are inappropriate because otherwise they will have to leave their foster family and make the transition to independence.

Interviews with those that did not stay put revealed that seven were faring well, however, leaving care personal advisers or foster carers perceived that six young people's EET trajectories had been hindered because they left care at 18. Factors influencing their ability to continue in education or obtain permanent employment were accommodation instability, lack of motivation to attend college or go to work and limited support and encouragement from former carers and leaving care personal advisers. Accommodation instability appeared to impact on three young people's educational achievements²⁹; although in two of these cases young women's emotional health was also implicated as a barrier to engagement in EET. Remaining in education was also problematic for two young men who both left their courses as they found it difficult to motivate themselves to attend college regularly, as one of their former foster carers explained:

When he left here, he was in education, and he was doing an IT course, which he was really good at, the only thing that he got a, you know, O level in. But, he, the temptation of laying in bed and going out with your friends and doing whatever it is young people do, was too much so he gave that up. So, due to that factor, he had to sign on to the dole (LA L).

The young man in question revealed in his interview that he would have found it easier to continue in education if he had remained in care:

If I could change something, I'd probably be back home... it's just easier while being in education and that. It's a lot easier (Christian, did not stay put).

The following case studies, based on interview data, illustrate how different circumstances influence young people's opportunities and decisions concerning engagement in EET.

²⁹ One of these young women moved at least seven times in three years.

EET case studies

Stayed put and in higher education

Catherine's foster carers have proactively encouraged her to have high aspirations and supported her to attain the qualifications she needed to follow her chosen career pathway. At 19 Catherine is enrolled on a foundation degree. Staying put allowed her to continue with her education and remain in a secure family placement.

Her decision was to continue going to [college town] where they do university courses through the University of [city], so she's been able to stay here, which is what she wanted... the continuity for her is, is really good (foster carer).

Being able to stay put also meant that she did not have to live on campus and accrue debts, 'she's able to go without taking any of the loans and she can come home so she's got no stress' and it has allowed her to focus entirely on her education.

Catherine has nearly completed the first year of her three year course. Her leaving care personal adviser reflected that:

[Catherine] would possibly struggle if she moved on to independence and wanted to, you know, continue with her education.

Did not stay put ('young person led decision'). Housing instability affecting educational attainment

Mathew was encouraged to stay put until he had finished his education, however he chose to leave care and move in with a friend. This arrangement broke down and after three months he decided to go and live with his birth mother. Although he continued with his education, changes in his accommodation affected his grades. He found it difficult to continue with his education and move to new accommodation and his grades suffered; this meant that he did not get a place at university.

Leaving care personal adviser: I think that period of being unsettled [multiple accommodation moves] did impact on his education, so he went from being on track to get distinctions to struggling to get merits, and it was just really disappointing because, you know, he had the potential there.

Interviewer: And did he manage to finish his college course?

Leaving care personal adviser: He did finish. Didn't get the grades that he'd hoped for, which meant that he didn't get the UCAS points that he needed.

Following this, Mathew went into employment. He has recently reapplied to university and at the time of interview was anticipating starting a degree in September.

Stayed put, moved to independence and in employment

Helen stayed put for just under a year. While she was living in foster care she made the transition from school to college; however she found the course 'overwhelming' and left to go into employment with an element of training. Her foster carers actively encouraged her to train and work in an area she had excelled in and enjoyed.

They're [foster carers] really supportive and they've encouraged me to do something that they thought, think that I'd be good at doing.

This employment involved interacting with customers and her foster carers noted that this had increased her level of confidence. This young woman had also won awards at college for her achievements.

Preparing and supporting young people for independence

The discussion above illustrates a range of benefits of staying put. It offers young people:

- greater continuity and stability;
- opportunities that are open to the majority of their peers in the general population;
- more time to mature, develop and prepare for independence;
- support, advice and encouragement of foster carers (acting as good parents);
- a framework to promote better engagement and progress in EET;
- the chance of a more gradual journey to independence; and
- the opportunity to be active agents in decisions concerning the timing of their transitions.

These benefits have also been identified in respect of the *Going the Extra Mile Scheme* (Northern Ireland's equivalent of staying put). However, in practice, the extent to which these benefits are realised will depend on a complex interplay of child, family and environmental factors. The remainder of the chapter explores the systems and processes local authorities have in place to support foster carers to equip, support and prepare young people for independence and to ensure that young people are able to actively participate in decisions concerning their futures.

Pathway planning

The Planning Transitions from Care to Adulthood Guidance, including the *Care Leavers (England) Regulations* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010) state that

professionals are expected to: 'engage constructively with the young person to define priorities and the focus of the plan'. Interviews with young people indicated that the majority (24 out of 32; 75%) did not feel that the pathway planning process had assisted with preparation and planning for independence. Consistent with previous research, criticisms centred upon the bureaucratic nature of the process, which was seen to serve the needs of the organisation rather than the young people concerned (Edwards, 2011; Munro *et al.*, 2011a). During the peer research event³⁰ this was dubbed 'pathway planning syndrome' (see also National Care Advisory Service, 2012). It was suggested that completion of the pathway plan had become an end in itself rather than a process to assist young people. For example, one young person explained that pathway planning was:

Absolute rubbish. I'm not going to lie, and they take so long to do, and you never look at them again after they've been done. I don't even know what mine says to be honest (Ellie, stayed put).

However, there were eight young people (25%) who were positive about the pathway planning process as it gave them more time to explore their educational aspirations, future plans and to prepare for independence. The following quotes reflect this:

I think it's helpful because it's kind of like goals and aims and things, and it's not kind of just, it's not like all this is going to happen but it's just a bit of a plan really, a bit of a guideline to what would be helpful for later on in life (Kristen, did not stay put).

It's just, like, helping me to realise my dream, like, what I want in life and what I want to achieve (Helen, stayed put).

Findings from the Right2BCare4 evaluation also suggest that young people appeared to value plans when they explored current circumstances and how these were likely to change in the foreseeable future and when clear goals were set and it was clear what services the local authority would supply to support them in making the transition from care to independence (Munro *et al.*, 2011a). However, given that many young people did not perceive the pathway planning process as particularly useful it is worthwhile considering other vehicles for preparing young people for independence.

Preparation

Preparation for adult life is a gradual process and the tasks that children take on will increase with age and personal development. The process should be participatory and

³⁰ An event where peer researchers worked with staff from CCFR and NCAS to analyse qualitative data from interviews that they did with young people for the staying put evaluation.

involve 'discussion – or argument – as well as negotiation, risk taking, making mistakes and trying again' (Dixon and Stein, 2005, p.55). The process should start early and support the development of practical, emotional and interpersonal skills for adulthood (Stein and Wade, 2000). During the early stages of implementation of the staying put pilots, professionals raised some anxieties that it was not uncommon for foster carers to overprotect young people in their care. Young people may continue to experience difficulties when they leave care, irrespective of age, if they have not received sufficient preparation and therefore have to suddenly adjust to instant adulthood (Munro *et al.*, 2010b; Munro *et al.*, 2011a). That is, they may experience extended and abrupt transitions to adulthood (Stein and Munro, 2008). Analysis of interview data from phase two of the evaluation revealed that there was near universal recognition amongst professionals and foster carers that young people need to be equipped with practical life skills, including managing their finances, preparing and cooking meals, shopping for groceries and undertaking general household tasks such as cleaning, washing and ironing. However, perceptions of when, how and by whom these skills should be imparted, varied within and between local authorities.

At one end of the spectrum, 12 foster carers indicated that they taught those in their care skills in the same way they would their own children, as typified by the following quote:

We, the way that we've brought the children up, basically, from an early age, is for them to have a reasonable level of responsibility for what they can handle as they start growing up. So I mean, she, they've all had their chores which are, like, little things to do with cleaning up after dinner or doing the washing up or, or mopping or sweeping the floor, and then, vacuuming the bedrooms and keeping the bedrooms tidy so there's been a variety of things that are general things that we all can do that as foster children, they, they've had to learn how to do it, to a decent standard (LA Q).

In such cases children's social care services were able to take a background role, rather than interfering in family life. The value of this approach was also endorsed by a leaving care personal adviser who highlighted that historically there had been a tendency for local authorities to focus upon preparation and skills development as pathway planning activities rather than seeing them as an integral part of their upbringing. Indeed, a couple of foster carers understood gradual preparation to start at 16 years of age, whereas:

Ideally, you know, we'd be doing some of these things at a much younger age... you know, in tiny, tiny steps, but young people may be eight, nine, or ten helping with the cooking, you know? So sort of small things... and accompany the foster carer to pay bills and, you know, those things that lots of our young people for various reason miss out on (leaving care personal adviser, LA L).

This gradual and incremental approach was experienced by some young people, but at the other end of the spectrum at least three leaving care personal advisers gave examples of cases in which they were having to take a much more substantive role in supporting young people to develop skills post 16 years to try and ensure they were adequately prepared for independence. Where this responsibility was perceived to fall varied between authorities. In LA M if young people were assessed to need more preparation and support then this would be provided directly to the young person by the leaving care personal adviser. In LA L and N if it was perceived that foster carers were overprotecting young people and denying them the opportunity to take on greater responsibility and develop their skills then the leaving care personal advisers would work closely with foster carers to try and address this. It was acknowledged that this is not always easy:

When you look after somebody that's post-18, it's a very different relationship than looking after somebody that's under 18, because we don't really want carers to 'look after' young people, we want them to support them into independence... And that's quite a different role for a lot of the carers, it can be, you know, quite a challenge to sort of achieve that with them really (leaving care personal adviser, LA L).

Changes in rights, relationships and expectations as young people enter adulthood

Staying put managers in the early stages of implementation of the pilot revealed different perspectives upon the extent to which reaching legal adulthood should instigate a review of foster carers' and young people's respective roles and responsibilities:

It's a continuation of a relationship but it's a different phase... I think some carers have struggled with that. Where we've drawn up the license agreement I always promote that as a good opportunity to revisit the rules and maybe make adjustments and recognise that the young person is older now and may want to change some things. Some carers have really struggled with that (LA P).

Interviews with leaving care personal advisers revealed that a small number of carers failed to adjust and recognise that those remaining in their care were entering early adulthood. In two cases leaving care personal adviser indicated that foster carers had continued to treat those staying put as a child and had not removed or relaxed restrictions placed on young people prior to them reaching 18 years of age.

Their [foster carers] coming in times are quite early, and in terms of staying, a lot of staying put providers, you know, a young person is actually an adult now and as long as they let them know where they are, they don't mind them staying out overnight, you know, as long as

they let them know. Whereas in this placement, you have to ask permission to stay out. Whereas it's about, actually, you're an adult now and it's courtesy to let us [adults] know where you are and that you're safe and when you'll be back but it's not so much about asking permission. And, the other young person who stays put in the same placement as [young person] was actually told that she couldn't go out on occasions. You know, and then, that led to her getting very cross and angry, whereas actually, you know, I think, with an adult, it should be a different, you know, different sort of things going on really (leaving care personal adviser, LA Q).

If the young person is unable to exercise their rights, as an adult, this restricts their opportunities and development; intentionally breaking the rules imposed on them may jeopardise the placement or precipitate unplanned or abrupt transitions to independence. In a small number of cases leaving care personal advisers had to intervene and encourage carers to relax the rules in place and allow those in their care more freedom, as one leaving care personal adviser explained:

We've worked really hard with them [carers] over the last two years especially to start preparing [young person] for independence because he was, even though he was over 18 and still in placement, he was very much still being looked after and wasn't actually developing those independence skills in preparation for moving on (LA L).

It is important that that foster carers, leaving care personal advisers and young people consider and discuss how respective roles and responsibilities will change when staying put arrangements commence. As one carer reflected:

I like to have a meeting with them when they are eighteen because the rules do change slightly because they are staying put, aren't they? It's not like fostering then, is it? It's different. When they're eighteen, they think they can do what they want (foster carer).

Communication with and support from children's social care services

As the sections above illustrate, authorities generally anticipated that the fostering task would evolve as young people approached adulthood. Foster carers have flexibility to relax rules and regulations which apply to looked after children but there is also an expectation that young people will take greater responsibility for themselves. Carers are tasked with promoting young people's engagement with EET and preparing young people to navigate the transition to adulthood. The actions taken by foster carers may open up possibilities for young people; however there is no guarantee that young people will respond in the intended manner. As one carer reflected, despite her best efforts to teach her foster son to cook '*he couldn't cook a pot noodle*'. At this developmental stage young people's relationships and

behaviour can change rapidly and it is important that carers are equipped and supported to manage such issues. Overall, half of those who expressed a view concerning the social work support they received were positive, as reflected in the following quotes:

It's never a problem to get hold of them. They've been very supportive (foster carer, LA Q)

I've got a very good key worker and he's very supportive. If I've got something major going on he will ring me daily to make sure I'm okay (foster carer, LA L).

However, there were also foster carers in these and the other pilot authorities who felt that high case loads and capacity issues meant that social workers were often 'fire fighting' and that contact and support were minimal when placements were perceived to be stable. A number of foster carers expressed frustration about this, as the following two quotes illustrate:

While you're seen to be coping and not, you know, bothering a social worker, they let you do it... you phone up, oh sorry, she's not in today, she's sick, or she's busy, I'll leave a message on her desk and no one gets back [to you] (foster carer, LA L).

As far as they're concerned, if it's not a problem placement, everything's ticketyboo... Sometimes it might help if they responded quicker... and perhaps listened a bit more.... They're putting out fires, you know, and our call may well be to actually prevent one in the first place... You know, the idea is that we're trying to prevent [a fire]... (foster carer, LA N).

Once again, different perceptions reflect variations in foster carers skills, experience, the needs of young people in their care and their expectations governing the level of support they receive. However, interviews did reveal specific issues that appear to have arisen with regards to staying put. Four carers indicated that once young people reached 18, they, as foster carers had been excluded from the decision making process concerning young people's future plans. For example, one foster carer explained that:

After care workers, they are great... but they come in, I've looked after this child for eleven years, I know this child better than anybody and I'm almost surplus to requirements. You know, almost treated like a landlady (foster carer, LA L).

Another reflected that:

We want to be recognised as foster carers as being professionals. We would like to be part of the judgment of whether a child is ready to go because we know them better than

anybody. Sometimes we know them better than their own parents, their own social worker... Still decisions are made and we're sometimes the last people to know (LA N).

This highlights the importance of effective channels of communication and dialogue between leaving care personal advisers, foster carers and young people once formal review mechanisms cease. Without this foster carers may be excluded from active involvement in decisions regarding young people's transitions. This may undermine their ongoing involvement once young people have moved into their own homes. The peer researchers felt strongly that where possible relationships between foster carers and young people should be continued and maintained once they had moved on (National Care Advisory Service, 2012).

Messages for policy and practice

- Staying put allows young people greater control of the timing of their transition from care and stops them feeling that they have been 'pushed', 'forced' or 'kicked out' by the State. It also assists them to remain in EET; at aged 19; 40% of young people who did not stay put were NEET due to 'other circumstances' (i.e. not due to illness or disability) compared to 9% of those who stayed put.
- Strict EET criteria may have unintended consequences; young people may feel compelled to enrol or remain on courses that are inappropriate because otherwise they may lose their entitlement to stay put.
- It would be desirable to introduce mechanisms to facilitate transitions between educational courses and within and between education and employment without this having consequences on young people's entitlement to stay put and foster carers' financial entitlements.
- Leaving care personal advisers, in collaboration with foster carers and young people, need to establish how respective roles and responsibilities will change when young people reach legal adulthood.

Chapter six: Transitional pathways

Introduction

So far, the report has focused upon the operation of the staying put pilot and young people's in-care experiences. However, it is also important to understand how these shape young people's journey's from care to independence. Where possible, the research team have examined young people's transition pathways and experiences of moving out of foster care and into the community. Regrettably, the timeframes for completion of the evaluation meant that only nine young people who stayed put had moved to independence at the point of interviews. Therefore, data on those who stayed put and subsequently moved on and on those who did not stay put has been grouped; where there are key differences in experiences and pathways these are indicated in the text.

Pathways to independence

Based on young peoples' accounts Munro and colleagues (2011a) identified three key pathways from care to independence. First, the '**direct pathway**' which involves making the transition straight from foster care to independent living in a council or privately rented property. Second, a '**transitional placement pathway**', which involves young people living in one or more supported living placements before living independently. Such placements are intended to offer young people support as they acquire the skills that they need to be able to secure and maintain their own tenancies in the future and thus act as a bridge to independence (National Care Advisory Service/Catch 22, 2009). Finally, some young people experience '**complex pathways**' marked by multiple moves and changes.

The factors precipitating young people's transitions to independence also vary. '**Young person led**' decisions were influenced by young people's desire to be: 'free' and 'independent', to return to birth parents, or to levels of satisfaction with existing placements and relationships with carers. '**Foster carer led and age related**' transitions were required because foster carers³¹ were not willing or able to extend placements for young people beyond their 18th birthday. Placement breakdowns or multiple reasons ('**breakdown or multiple**') precipitating young people's transitions were identified in a small number of cases.

Data were available on 22 young people (nine who had stayed put; 13 who did not stay put). Table 6.1 below provides details of young people's transition pathways and the factors precipitating their movement from care to independence. Findings revealed that young

³¹ In two cases these decisions were 'local authority led' rather than 'foster carer led.'

people most commonly took either the direct or complex pathway from care to independence, with nine (41%) young people following the direct route and nine (41%) following the complex route. The direct pathway was the most common pathway for young people who stayed put (six out of nine; 67%) and in all but one case these transitions were young person led. In contrast the complex route was the most common pathway for those that did not stay put (six out of 13; 46%). In the three cases where young people stayed put and subsequently experienced complex placement pathways; one young man left to live closer to his family and the remaining two ‘got in with the wrong crowds’ and then chose to leave their care placements. Transitional pathways were least common (four out of 22; 18%) and were confined to cases where young people were unable to stay put and thus had to make the transition to independence earlier than may have been in their best interests.

Table 6.1: Pathways to independence and factors precipitating transitions

| | Direct pathway | | | Transitional pathway | | | Complex pathway | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----|----------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|------------------|-----|
| | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All |
| Young person led | 5 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Foster carer led and age related | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Breakdowns or multiple | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 6 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 9 |

It is noteworthy that the pathways to independence amongst young people eligible for staying put differ from another sample of care leavers. Findings from the Right2BCared4 evaluation revealed that the most common pathway amongst a sample of 20 young people aged 16 to 18 was the transitional placement pathway, which was experienced by 11 young people (55%). Six young people followed the complex pathway (30%) and three followed the direct pathway (15%) (Munro *et al.*, 2011a, see appendix five for further details). In this context, the staying put pilot can be understood to have been utilised as an alternative to providing supported placements as a stepping stone to independence and as a means of promoting continuity, stability and young people’s active participation in the timing of their transitions.

Direct pathways

Staying put facilitates direct pathways from care to independence as it offers young people additional time to mature, develop and prepare for independence within their existing foster placement. Of the six young people who stayed put and then followed the direct placement pathway, four revealed that they were ready and prepared for independence and were faring well. Kate stayed put for seven months before deciding to make the transition from care to independence; when she left she felt practically, emotionally and financially prepared. Her transition pathway is illustrated below:

Figure 6.1: Kate’s direct pathway from care to independence

| Young person’s age | Young person’s home | Reasons for changes | EET status |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---|------------|
| 18 | Staying put placement | Young person wished to stay in her placement beyond 18 which her foster carers allowed. | Employment |
| | Privately renting | Young person led: moved in with her boyfriend. | Employment |

Kate benefited from a smooth transition to independence and explained that:

It’s nice to have some peace and quiet and to be doing my own thing... I like it; I like to have my own independence... and do stuff by myself.

However, Kim made the transition to independence earlier than she had anticipated because questions were raised about whether or not it was appropriate to maintain her staying put foster placement when she was spending the majority of time at her partner’s home. She acknowledged that she felt ready for independence when she moved into her tenancy but she then revealed:

I had a breakdown. I had to go to hospital and was put on antidepressants. They said it was all because I’d moved out so quick, but I felt, I felt that I was fine, but... and they do say maybe it’s because this blanket’s been taken away now, like, you’re on your own from here, but I thought I was fine.

Following this initial setback Kim had adjusted and reported that:

Things have worked out how I wanted them to, definitely. I did want to move in with my partner and I did want to get a job, so that's all worked out... I'd say I'm doing great and I'm really proud of how well I'm doing.

However, this case example does highlight the importance of adequate preparation and planning for young people's transitions; rather than simply postponing the timing of these until young people are a little older.

Transitional pathways

Transitional pathways, involving a period of time in one or more supported placements can serve as a bridge to independence and offer young people a chance to develop their skills in a supportive setting. Such placements are not uncommon for 16 to 17 year olds and such arrangements may work well when young people are keen to be 'free' and 'independent' but remain vulnerable and professional assessments suggest that they are ill-equipped to live alone (Munro *et al.*, 2011a). Four young people in the in-depth sample were placed in supported accommodation before they moved into their own tenancies. These transitions were not young person led; they were driven by foster carers or local authority decisions not to permit young people to stay put. Two young people felt prepared for independence on the basis that their foster carers had assisted them to develop their skills. Having spent three years in a stable foster placement Kristen felt ready to live alone and after a short time in supported lodgings she moved into her own home. She was reportedly happy with her current situation:

I like spending time by myself. I'm happy in my own company... I just enjoy now being in my flat, 'cos it's just sort of just coming together really, it's feeling more homely (did not stay put, foster carer led decision).

However, in the remaining two cases experiences were less positive:

Practically it was good, quite easy. Er, emotionally a mess, 'cos I didn't even know what was going to happen; and then financially I lost like £200 a month (Lewis, did not stay put, foster carer led decision).

Practically it was easy but emotionally and financially it's hard (Christian, did not stay put, foster carer led decision)

Lewis was evicted from his first supported placement as he failed to pay his rent because he 'felt other things were more important'. Figure 6.2 below provides an overview of his placement pathway.

Figure 6.2: Lewis' transitional pathway from care to independence

| Young person's age | Young person's home | Reasons for changes | EET status |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--|------------|
| 18 | Supported accommodation | Foster carer led: needed to move to independence to learn how to look after himself and take on additional responsibilities. | Education |
| 20 | Supported accommodation | Accommodation breakdown: evicted due to failure to pay his rent. | NEET |

Complex pathways

Complex pathways were experienced by nine young people (41%), the majority of whom (six out of nine) did not stay put before making their transition to independence. In the majority of cases moves were precipitated by poor relationships with carers, although in a couple of cases young people 'got in with a bad crowd' and wanted to be free from their foster carers intervention. However, all but one young person who experienced a complex pathway also acknowledged that they had not been emotionally and/or financially prepared or ready to move on. This was the case even when young people had precipitated their own transitions from care at age 18.

Practically it was good; emotionally it knocked me a bit for a while; erm... financially it knocked me because all of a sudden I was paying my own rent and having to get my own food and stuff (Amanda, did not stay put, 'young person' led decision).

Between them these nine young people experienced in excess of 32 placement moves in their early adult lives. This instability and change is reflected in the two case studies below.

Having been placed with his foster carers aged 11 Andrew decided to stay put. After becoming involved with the 'wrong crowd' he decided to leave care nine months after his 18th birthday. After moving into a shared house he was evicted for not paying his rent. He was placed in a hostel but given a custodial sentence for a crime he committed. After his release from prison he returned to live with his former foster carers who were very

committed to him and let him stay on an informal basis until suitable independent accommodation became available. His complex pathway is illustrated below:

Figure 6.3: Andrew’s complex pathway from care to independence

| Young person’s age | Young person’s home | Reasons for changes | EET status |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---|------------|
| 18 | Staying put placement | Young person wished to stay in his placement beyond 18 which his foster carers allowed. | Education |
| | Shared housing | Young person led: decided to move to independence. | Unknown |
| 19 | Hostel | Accommodation breakdown: evicted due to failure to pay his rent. | Unknown |
| | Prison | Given a custodial sentence. | NEET |
| | Former foster carers | Foster carers offered him a place to stay upon his release from prison. | Unknown |
| | Rented accommodation | Provision of accommodation from his former foster carers was temporary. | Unknown |

Robert was placed with a specialist foster carer at the age of 15 following the breakdown of his adoption. His local authority was not willing to extend his placement beyond 18 years of age. At 18 he was staying with his partner, but semi-independent accommodation was secured. He did not want to leave his placement ‘*I didn’t want to [leave] but I was bracing myself... you know when something’s going to happen... I didn’t want to leave*’ and found living independently challenging ‘*financially it’s a bit poo, ‘cos like I have no money... Erm emotionally that’s been, like a bit emotionally battering... going from having a flat to having nothing and everything, but I just try and make the best of situations that I’m in*’. He has experienced multiple accommodation changes since leaving care as figure 6.4 shows.

Figure 6.4: Robert’s complex pathway from care to independence

| Young person’s age | Young person’s home | Reasons for changes | EET status |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---|------------|
| 18 | Stayed with partner | Authority led decision: unable to stay put. Staying with his partner when decision was made. | NEET |
| | Supported accommodation | Living with his partner temporarily until semi-independent accommodation was secured. | NEET |
| | Stayed with friends | Accommodation breakdown: evicted due to behaviour. | NEET |
| | Rented accommodation | Living with his friends temporarily until independent accommodation was secured. | NEET |
| 20 | Stayed with partner | Young person led decision: decided to move in with his partner | NEET |
| | Stayed with a friend | Accommodation breakdown: Relationship with his partner ended. | NEET |
| | Rented accommodation | Living with his friends temporarily until independent accommodation was secured. | Employed |

Out of the nine young people that experienced complex pathways, four spent periods of time living with members of their birth family upon leaving care. Three left their placements due to their strong desire to return to their birth family, whereas one young woman returned to live with a member of her extended birth family after leaving her placement abruptly and having no viable alternative and also later lived with her birth mother following the end of her relationship with her partner and in the absence of alternative accommodation.

Messages for policy and practice

- Staying put promotes the opportunity for young people to experience direct pathways from care to independence rather than transitional placement pathways involving one or more placements in supported accommodation as a bridge to independence.
- Nine (five of whom did not stay put) experienced complex placement pathways and in excess of 32 placement moves in their early adult lives. The level of instability and change is detrimental to these young people's wellbeing but also has costs to the public purse.
- Not all young people want to remain in care longer, irrespective of what professionals and foster carers perceive to be in their best interests. It is important that packages of support are available to meet the needs of those who opt to make the transition from care to independence before they reach legal adulthood, particularly given that these young people may be most vulnerable and have the most complex needs.

Chapter seven: Organisational implications and the costs of Staying Put

The former DCSF provided approximately £1.5 million per year to pilot authorities from April 2008 to March 2011 (see appendix six for further details) to implement staying put. During this time the United Kingdom has seen one of the most severe and synchronised recessions since the Great Depression and concerns about public spending are at the forefront of social policy debate. In this climate local authorities are facing difficult choices concerning resource allocation. A NCAS survey of leaving care services identified that over half of leaving care services planned to cut services to care leavers and a further 30% reported some uncertainty about the future of some services (National Care Advisory Service, 2011a). At the same time, the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) and new guidance and regulations are intended to 'make sure that care leavers are provided with comprehensive personal support so that they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood' (Department for Education, 2010, s.1.3). In this context and having assessed the benefits of staying put for their looked after children each of the in-depth pilot authorities reported that they planned to continue providing staying put placements beyond the lifetime of the pilot. However, they also raised concerns about the future sustainability of doing so given the level of funding cuts and the increase in the numbers of children coming into care³². This chapter explores the implications for local authorities and carers of implementing staying put and the costs involved.

Tax and benefits

One purpose of the staying put pilots was to explore insurance, tax and benefit issues arising from extending foster placements post 18. In the early stages of the evaluation most of the pilot authorities reported some difficulties and challenges in this respect. An anxiety for foster carers was the potential change in their status when young people reached legal adulthood and how this might impact on their income (Munro *et al.*, 2011a). Since then HM Revenue and Customs have introduced changes to the tax arrangements for carers looking after vulnerable individuals under the Shared Lives scheme (Qualifying Care Relief). Since 6th April 2010 shared lives carers, including those offering staying put placements can claim Income Tax relief in the same manner as they did as foster carers under the Qualifying Care Relief scheme. For the purposes of Qualifying Care Relief staying put care is defined as follows:

³² Following the Southwark judgement and the death of Baby Peter Connelly.

If you provide care for someone who, immediately prior to reaching 18 years, was subject to a care order or was a 'looked after' child (this can include someone who was cared for under kinship care arrangements). The person who you care for must be 18 or over in full-time education, full time higher education or full-time vocational training. You must be receiving payments for providing care from a local authority or health service body and the person you care for must have a pathway plan (HM Revenue and Customs, 2011).

This allows authorities to deliver the 'hybrid' model of staying put and offers greater flexibility to provide extended foster placements for young people who may not have benefitted from long term stability and an 'established familial relationship' with foster carers. However, the education or training requirements introduced under Shared Lives could potentially exclude some of the most vulnerable young people from ongoing placements with foster carers, thereby denying them further support to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes. However, HMRC are in the process of consulting on draft amendments to aspects of the specified social care schemes that are eligible for Qualifying Care Relief. One of the amendments is designed to ensure that carers of previously looked after children, who stay with their carers once they reach the age of 18, will continue to qualify for tax relief while the person cared for is aged 18 to 21 and remains with them, whether or not the person cared for is in full-time education.

Staying Put Guidance (Department for Education *et al.*, forthcoming) will highlight that payments made to staying put carers from children's services under section 23c will continue to be disregarding in calculating a carers benefit entitlement if the whole payment comes from children's services. This mirrors the system of disregarded payments to foster carers where children are aged under 18. However, this may be problematic where part of the payment to staying put carers comes from the young person's contribution, either from employment, education allowances and/or benefit entitlement (which may include housing benefit) and the carer is in receipt of a means tested benefit. Work is underway to address these issues with the introduction of the Universal Credit from October 2013). The following section explores the different financial arrangements that pilot authorities developed to support young people and carers in practice.

Financial arrangements: payments to staying put carers

Interviews revealed that there were variations in financial arrangements to support staying put placements. The arrangements in the in-depth sites are summarised in Table 7.1 below. As this shows the financial contributions that children's social care provided towards placement costs ranged across the authorities, from £20 to £250 (including Supporting

People funds where applicable) a week. This was also influenced by levels of funding through Supporting People and the employment status of young people.

Table 7.1: Payments to staying put providers

| Local authority | Standard payments (weekly) | Source of income | Variations and additional features |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| LA L | £217.91 | If young people are earning they contribute a third of their earnings (after travel expenses) Children's social care services fund the remainder | Enhanced payments considered for specialist carers and those caring for young people with disabilities |
| LA M | £160 - £265 in year one and £140 - £245 thereafter | Supporting people grant: £70 - £150 Children's social care payment: £20 (year one only) Young person's contribution: £70 - £95 | No higher rate payments for IFAs |
| LA N | £200 | Children's social care services: £150 Young person's contribution from earning or benefits: £50 | Enhanced payments considered if the foster carer only provides one placement or receives specialist fees The local authority will act as an 'agent' allowing the foster carer to receive their payment direct from the local authority who then collect payments from the young person |
| LA P | £246 | Children's social care services: £121 Supporting People: £45 Young person's contribution: £80 (from earnings or benefits) | Enhanced payments for IFAs and specialist placements were paid originally but this is no longer the case Young people pay an additional contribution if they are earning over £50 per week (after rent). Additional payments tend to be around £15 per week |
| LA Q | £208.50 | Young person's contribution is based on their earnings or benefits. It is calculated at 50% but after £53.45 has been disregarded (their allowance for personal items) The maximum contribution is £50 Children's social care payment: £123.28 | Enhanced payments for IFAs (£250 per week) Retainer payments if young people go to university Placement kept open for three months when the young person makes the transition to independence |
| LA R | £200 – £250 | Young people contribute (only if they are earning over £100): £25 - £50 per week (depending upon how much they are earning) | Enhanced payments for IFAs |

Young people's contributions

All of the local authorities participating in the in-depth evaluation had developed a protocol for young people to contribute to their placement costs from benefits or employment where appropriate. The amount varied depending upon the young person's circumstances and the local authorities' financial arrangements (see table 7.1).

We've encouraged her to claim housing benefit which perhaps, it's very difficult to explain this to [young person]... but, an element comes from ourselves and then an element comes from housing benefit, and then a little bit from the young person (leaving care personal adviser, LA P).

However there were mixed opinions amongst carers and children's social care staff as to whether expecting a young person to contribute towards their placement was appropriate. Although some saw this contribution as an essential aspect of the transition to adulthood and a symbol of adult responsibility others felt that it was not appropriate to charge someone to remain with their foster family. Some leaving care personal advisers, staying put managers and carers felt that some of the financial packages that had been developed encouraged a benefit culture:

We don't want to push our young people into a life of benefits. It was suggested to some of the other pilots that it's a good lesson for them to learn the benefits system and all this stuff. What we're saying is we want them [to have]... they should have bigger aspirations (staying put manager, LA N).

However there was also recognition of the need to offset costs to the local authority to ensure that the staying put was sustainable when the pilot funding came to an end.

Everybody was charged with maximising the income of staying put so that beyond the pilot, hopefully we would have a sustainable scheme (LA N).

The following section explores payments to foster carers and their experiences of the new arrangements implemented under the pilot.

Payments to foster carers

Local authorities had invested considerable time in explaining financial packages to foster carers (although leaving care personal advisers indicated that doing so was challenging). Some foster carers clearly understood the new arrangements:

There's three different payments, there's fostering element and then there's the, the bit that he's got to contribute which sort of changes depending on what part time work he's doing

and then there's the housing benefit. So that was different, obviously, chasing some of those things. Obviously, the money came down but that was balanced out because he doesn't receive the pocket money, clothes allowance and those sorts of things which is all in agreement anyway (foster carer, LA Q).

But there were a small number who indicated that the system was confusing:

I think that the staying put scheme should really provide extra financial support directly, because, when it comes to finances, things get really complex, and if you're having to apply for extra finances through different bodies, it can get really complex for us, let alone the young person (foster carer, LA Q).

The financial implications of providing staying put placements also varied between pilot authorities. Some authorities sought to continue to pay carers the same amount they were being paid prior to the young person reaching 18. Although these authorities were drawing on different revenue streams to fund placements they were committed to minimising any disruption to carers and trying to ensure that they received the same remuneration for fulfilling their parenting role. In other authorities, however, there was an expectation that foster carers would accept a lower level of remuneration once young people reached 18 on the basis that expectations upon them change. As one staying put manager explained:

We feel that the roles they [carers] provide are completely different because they're not carers anymore, they're providing a service, if you like, to get that young person to the point where they can leave the placement with as many skills as possible (LA S).

Either way, changes in payment mechanisms and funding sources had practical implications for carers. Under previous arrangements carers could expect a regular monthly payment from the local authority paid through bank transfer directly into their account. Once young people reached 18 carers could experience delays in payments that were beyond a local authority's control, for example, because of delays in housing benefit applications. Foster carers could also be reliant upon young people's contribution to their income (from benefit or employment). How these changes were experienced by foster carers themselves was highly variable, reflecting their different financial circumstances and attitudes surrounding their role.

When he was in staying put, obviously, it's [payments] reduced. [But] to be honest, we lose fifteen thousand a year just doing this. So I don't actually do it for money, I do it, enjoy doing it (foster carer, LA N).

Interviewer: Does he [young person] contribute by paying board?

Foster carer: He should, but he doesn't.

Interviewer: And was that your decision or his decision?

Foster carer: Well, he never offered it and I mentioned it now and again and it was never forthcoming, so... in the end it was just at, you know, an impasse. And it's, when it's... when it's, erm, a child that's been with you for all that length of time and they've been fostered like your own children you just live with it in the end because you know if you didn't take, if you took it off them for housekeeping, you'd have to give it them back for something else, so you know, what's the point? (foster carer, LA Q).

However, it should be recognised that some carers may not be able to afford to continue to care for a young person without financial assistance. In this context expecting carers to take a reduction in income may cause financial hardship.

I love [young person], I really love him. And I can't imagine, I can't imagine ever saying, for any reason that [young person] had to go. I can't imagine that. But my husband's been diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat, so his job has changed, so my husband is now earning half the income he used to earn. I can't imagine ever saying [young person] is going to have to go and you're going to have to give me one that I'll get paid, full pay, I can't ever imagine that. But, in the real world, [laughs] if we were about to lose the roof over our head... (foster carer, LA L).

I've maybe lost something but not much. But unfortunately, I need the money to pay the mortgage (foster carer, LA N).

In a small minority of cases foster carers objected to reduced levels of remuneration on the basis that they were continuing in their role as carer and because they did not feel that their responsibilities had diminished:

It just seems I'm doing harder work... erm, for less money. More work, more work, not harder, more work (foster carer, LA Q).

Overall, however, unless carers were retiring or had taken a decision that they were not going to continue fostering, 13 out of 17, in principle, were willing to offer staying put placements in the future. The remainder of the chapter explores the cost implications that this may have for local authorities.

Unit costs of staying put

The methodology to calculate the unit costs of staying put is outlined in detail in appendix one. The research team utilised a 'bottom up' approach to costing whereby all the activities to support young people in their staying put placements were identified. These activities broadly fall into four case management processes, these are as follows:

- decide young person will continue in placement under staying put arrangements;
- maintaining the staying put placement;
- young person ceases to be looked after; and
- review of staying put placement/arrangements.

Breaking down the support activities into the component parts is an approach that has been utilised by the research team for a number of years. Replication of the method for this evaluation facilitates comparisons with previously calculated unit costs of standard leaving care processes and procedures along with those for Right2BCared4 (see Ward *et al.*, 2008; Munro *et al.*, 2011a).

Time use activity data

The activity figures ('time use') outlined in the following section are based on averages across all the in-depth sites; they draw on data from focus groups with practitioners and verification questionnaires. Although findings revealed that there were variations in practice between pilot authorities the activity figures from each were comparable and there was not any evidence of any activity figures that had to be regarded as outliers. Given the small numbers of practitioners involved in delivering staying put (and therefore providing time use data) it was not viable to carry out comparisons between local authorities.

The methodology employed facilitates exploration of variations in activity for young people with different needs or in different circumstances (see Ward *et al.*, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, forthcoming). Practitioners reported that a number of factors influenced the level of support required to support young people in and leaving care. It was identified that less ongoing support was required for placements that were well established and when young people were settled with their carers. Completion of housing and benefit applications was a time consuming process particularly when young people were moving frequently. Although workers reported these differences anecdotally there was insufficient evidence of variations in activity to support children with different needs, or with differing experiences, predominantly because of the small numbers of young people that had experienced staying put at the point of data collection. Therefore the unit costs for staying put have been

calculated based on a standard set of processes. Table 7.2 shows the average activity times for each of the four processes outlined above.

Table 7.2: Average activity times¹ for staying put processes

| Process | Practitioner type ² | | | Total activity for each process |
|---|---|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| | Leaving care personal advisor/social worker | Staying put manager/team manager | Administrator | |
| Decide young person will continue in placement under staying put arrangements | 14 hrs 30 mins | 6 hrs 50 mins | 1 hr 5 mins | 22hrs 25 mins |
| Maintaining the staying put placement (per week) | 3 hrs | 2 hrs 30 mins | 50 mins | 6hrs 20mins |
| Young person ceases to be looked after | 21 hrs 45 mins | 13 hrs | 1 hr 40 mins | 36hrs 25mins |
| Review of staying put placements | 7 hrs 5 mins | 4 hrs 15 mins | 1 hr | 12hrs 20 mins |

¹ Activity times have been rounded in the table to the nearest five minutes. The cost calculations have been based on actual reported times.

² The activity times do not include any of the ongoing support provided by the staying put foster carers. Their input is included in the cost calculations in terms of the fee/allowance that is paid.

One of the objectives of this evaluation was to compare the cost of staying put processes with those for standard leaving care and Right2BCared4 processes. It had been anticipated that it would be possible to identify distinct variations in activities and costs associated with the implementation of Right2BCared4 compared to standard leaving care practice. However, analysis did not identify any differences in activity between standard leaving care processes in a sample of local authorities and the processes carried out as part of the Right2BCared4 pilot (Munro *et al.*, 2011a). Table 7.3 provides details on the average activity times for the four processes examined in table 7.2 above.

Table 7.3: Average activity times¹ for standard leaving care processes

| Process | Practitioner type | | | | | | Total activity for processes |
|--|---|--------------|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Leaving care personal adviser/social worker | Team manager | Administrator | Family placement/ fostering team | Other senior manager | Independent Reviewing Officer | |
| Decide young person needs provision of a placement | 10 hrs 15 mins | 2 hrs | 15 mins | 9 hrs | 1 hr 45 mins | N/A | 23hrs 15mins |
| Maintaining the placement (per week) | 1 hr 55 mins | N/A | 6 hrs 55 mins | 3 hrs 35 mins | N/A | N/A | 12hrs 25mins |
| Young person ceases to be looked after | 10 hrs 30mins | N/A | 45 mins | N/A | N/A | N/A | 11hrs 15mins |
| Review of placement/ arrangements | 5 hrs 15 mins | 1 hr 30 mins | 1 hr | 2 hrs | N/A | 5 hrs 15 mins | 15hrs |

¹ Activity times have been rounded in the table to the nearest five minutes. The cost calculations have been based on actual reported times.

Comparison of levels of activity

It is evident from Tables 7.2 and 7.3 above that a wider range of practitioners are involved in standard leaving care processes for young people aged under eighteen compared to those post 18 (staying put). Despite this difference it is possible to carry out comparisons to explore the level of support that is required for young people aged 18 + who stay put, those who make the transition to supported lodgings and those who move onto independence but receive ongoing support from their leaving care personal adviser.

Role of the staying put manager

Staying put managers have a higher level of involvement in each of the four processes than team managers supporting young people up to the age of 18 years. Focus group data revealed that in most pilot authorities the staying put manager was involved in individual cases and carried out some of the case management support³³. As outlined above, all the in-depth sites reported that they would continue with the staying put scheme beyond the three year pilot, however without funding they reported that they would not have a staying put manager in post. At this juncture it is too soon to determine how this work will be distributed between professionals and who will pick up the level of case management that was being carried out by the staying put managers. This may be absorbed into the role of

³³ In some authorities it was clear that the staying put manager took responsibility for supporting and supervising the foster carer if the fostering team did not have an ongoing link to the family because other children were in placement.

team managers in the future. Alternatively the preparatory 'groundwork' to set up and integrate staying put to date may result in less input being required by a manager in the future. As with other pilots there is also the possibility that as staying put is mainstreamed and integrated with other services that there will be a reduction in activity in the longer term (see also Holmes *et al.*, 2008).

Role of the leaving care personal adviser

As shown in Table 7.2 the leaving care personal adviser spends on average three hours per week supporting a young person in their staying put placement. Personal advisers reported that they also supported other eligible young people in supported lodgings or other independent placements. Furthermore, they reported that their level of activity was higher for young people in independent placements and that they carried out more work with young people that were moving frequently.

Decision to provide staying put

It is evident from Table 7.2 above that the level of activity for the process of setting up a staying put placement is much higher than for other transitions. The practitioners reported that a substantial proportion of time is spent with both the young person and the carers discussing the implications of staying put and ensuring that all parties are in agreement and that staying put is the preferred option. Planned transitions in this way, where children or young people are actively involved in the decision making have been found to take longer and therefore tend to be more costly (see Holmes *et al.*, 2008). However, research on young people's transitions highlights the benefits of preparation and planning to promote positive outcomes (Stein and Munro, 2008).

Support from the fostering/family placement teams

Examination of the quarterly returns submitted by the pilots to DfE indicated that staying put placements continued to be supported by family placement/fostering teams. However, focus group data suggested that this was not the case; instead this function appeared to be taken on by the staying put manager and/or leaving care personal adviser. Practitioners identified that a relatively low level of support was required for well established 'familial' placements. As shown in Table 7.2 above there were not any reported activities that were carried out by the family placement or fostering teams post eighteen. However, *Staying Put Guidance* (Department for Education *et al.*, forthcoming) suggests that although legislation relating to fostering ceases to apply (if no foster children are in placement) key standards should continue to govern expectations including yearly review of carers and regular supervision from the supervising social worker.

Reviews

Practitioners reported that young people both in staying put placements and those in supported accommodation would be reviewed at similar time intervals to looked after children (every six months). The reviews were deemed to be more informal and the IRO ceased to be involved post 18. The *Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010* (s.7) outline that local authorities must review the pathway plans of relevant and former relevant children.

Calculation of unit costs

Staying put specific unit costs were calculated for the 2010-11 financial year for the four processes outlined above. The 'time use activity data' were combined with national salary scales and overheads to calculate a unit cost per hour for each type of practitioner involved in supporting staying put placements (Curtis, 2010). The average estimated unit costs for the staying put processes and for the standard leaving care processes are detailed in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Average social care unit costs for staying put processes¹

| Process | Unit cost – staying put (£) | Unit cost – standard leaving care (£) |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Decide young person will continue in placement | 816 | 873 |
| Maintaining the placement (per week) | 120 | 321 |
| Young person ceases to be looked after | 775 | 373 |
| Review | 446 | 556 |

¹ The activity times do not include any of the ongoing support provided by the staying put foster carers. Their input is included in the cost calculations in terms of the fee/allowance that is paid.

As Table 7.4 shows the estimated unit costs of two of the processes are similar: deciding the young person will continue in their placement and the review. The weekly cost of maintaining the young person in their placement is 37% of the cost to maintain a young person in local authority foster care before the age of 18. The cost of a young person leaving care following a staying put placement was reported to be more than double standard leaving care procedures. Both the personal adviser and the staying put manager reported high levels of activity to support young people throughout this transition.

Using the figures above it is possible to calculate an average unit cost for ongoing case management for a young person to stay put for one year. The total average cost per annum is estimated to be £7,122. If the young person entered staying put during the year then the additional cost of £816 would need to be added to this annual cost, similarly if they left their

staying put placement as a planned transition an additional cost of £775 would need to be added.

However, these costs only cover the ongoing case management. As outlined in Table 7.1 earlier in this section children's social care also contribute to the placement fee/allowance for young people in staying put placements. Although the contribution varies by authority, the median across the six in-depth sites is £137 per week. In order to estimate the annual total cost incurred to children's social care to provide a staying put placement, this figure needs to be added to the cost of the case management processes. Therefore, the total estimated cost to social care of providing a staying put placement is calculated to be £14,278, if the young person remains in placement for the full year.

As outlined earlier in this section all of the in-depth local authorities highlighted that although staying put would continue beyond the three year pilot the service would be mainstreamed and the staying put manager post would no longer be funded. As such it would be expected that the annual cost of providing a staying put placement will fall in the future. This finding aligns with those from other studies that have explored the costs of specialist interventions and have identified that costs are reduced once new services or interventions are embedded (Holmes *et al.*, 2008). It is possible to estimate the annual costs (assuming that the young person remains in the placement for a full year) based on a reduced level of team manager activity to replace the staying put managers. If staying put placements were supported in the future at the same or similar level of support to other leaving care placements, the estimated annual social care cost is reduced from £14,278 to £13,068.

This annual cost needs to be considered against the annual unit cost of foster care for children and young people aged under 18. Using the same methodology and including both the ongoing case management (including reviews and care planning) and the fee/allowance paid to foster carers the total cost to social care of providing a local authority foster placement is £25,828 for a young person below the age of legal adulthood.

Cost Case Studies

The following section outlines the comparative costs of different pathways for care leavers. These case studies are illustrative examples based on sample cases from the evaluation; they show the different trajectories of a young person that stayed put, a young person who was not eligible to stay and a young person who was able to but opted out.

The unit costs of ongoing support that have been outlined above focus on the costs incurred by children's social care. The following case studies illustrate the wider cost implications across a range of agencies and therefore to the public purse. They also highlight the need for a systems approach to costing and highlight the importance of considering cost implications across all agencies. Costs are calculated for a five year time period, both to show how costs build up over time and also to show the changes in cost distribution between agencies once a young person reaches the age of 18.

Catherine

Catherine continued to be placed with her long term foster carers post eighteen as part of the staying put pilot. Catherine had been placed with these carers for seven years prior to turning 18. At the point of interview she had stayed put for one year. During this time she had started a course at university. There was no evidence that this young person had received any additional support services from other agencies.

The costs incurred for Catherine are detailed in Table 7.5. The costs are broken down into the four year period prior to moving into the staying put scheme, and then for the one year that she remained in her staying put placement.

Timeline for Catherine

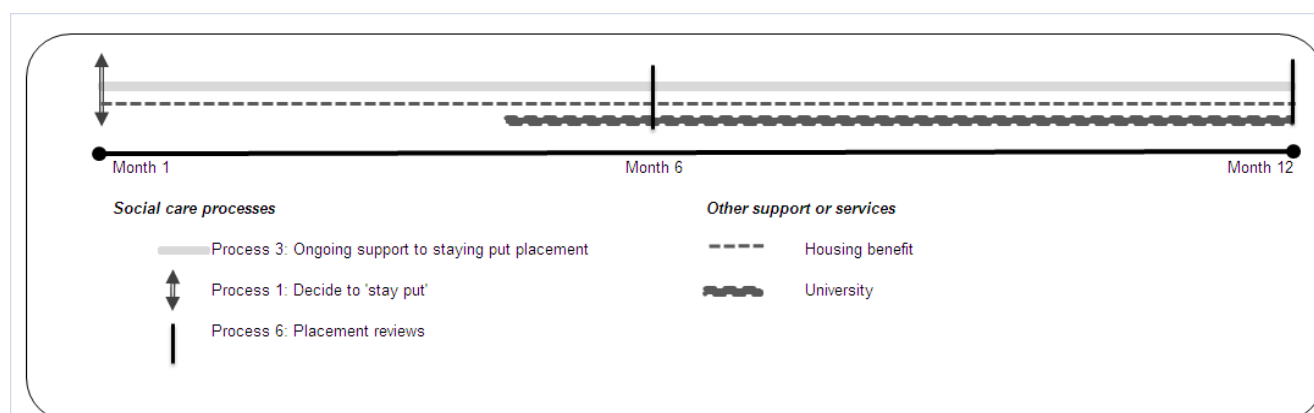


Table 7.5: Costs for Catherine

| Social care case management costs | | | |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Prior to staying put¹ | | | |
| Process | Frequency/duration | Unit cost (£) | Subtotal (£) |
| Process 3 - maintain the placement | 4 years | 322 (per week) | 66,976 |
| Process 2 - care planning | 8 | 131 | 1,048 |
| Process 6 – review | 8 | 556 | 4,448 |
| Process 8 - leaving care services | 1 | 1274 | 1,274 |
| Total social care cost | | | 73,746 |
| Staying put | | | |
| Process 1 - decide to stay put | 1 | 816 | 816 |
| Process 3 - maintain the placement | 1 year | 256 (per week) | 13,312 |
| Process 6 – review | 2 | 446 | 892 |
| Total social care cost | | | 15,020 |
| Cost to other agencies | | | |
| Housing benefit ² | 1 year | 112.50 (per week) | 5,850.00 |
| Total cost across other agencies | | | 20,870 |

¹ Process unit costs prior to staying put are taken from Ward *et al.*, (2008) and inflated to 2010-11 financial year.

² In recognition of the variability in the level of benefit between local areas a mid-point of benefit entitlement outlined by pilot authorities was used.

The total estimated social care costs for the four year time period prior to staying put were £73,746, this equates to an annual cost of £18,437. This annual cost fell to £15,020 when Catherine entered staying put (although there were additional costs incurred by other agencies).

Robert

Robert turned 18 just before the local authority began the staying put pilot. He came into care at the age of 15 and experienced seven placement moves. His first foster placement lasted a few weeks but the second lasted for three years. At 18 he made the transition to independence and moved in with his girlfriend; this arrangement lasted for three months. He then moved into a supported lodgings placement for four months but he was asked to leave as a result of his behaviour. Robert then moved to live with a friend for two months before living on his own for a further 21 months. Following this, he lived with a girlfriend for three months before moving in with another friend and eventually into his own accommodation.

Robert started to attend a further education college when he was placed with foster carers but chose to leave after a month. Since reaching legal adulthood he has received high levels of support from Connexions; at the point of interview he was working full time. He also saw a psychologist for approximately six months.

Timeline for Robert

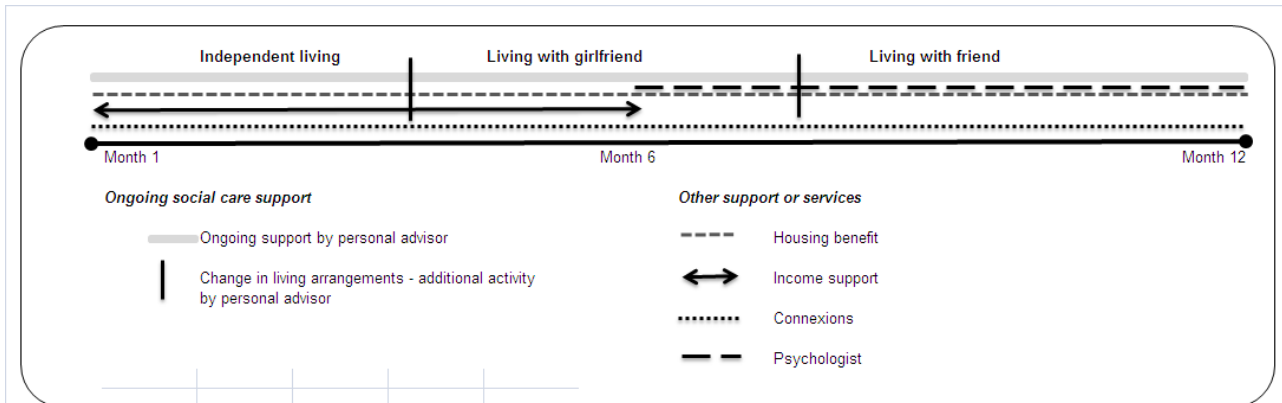


Table 7.6: Costs for Robert

| Social care case management costs | | | |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Prior to age 18¹ | | | |
| Process | Frequency/duration | Unit cost (£) | Subtotal (£) |
| Process 3 - maintain the placement | 2 years | 322 (per week) | 33,488 |
| Process 2 - care planning | 4 | 131 | 524 |
| Process 6 – review | 4 | 556 | 2,224 |
| Process 8 - leaving care services | 1 | 1274 | 1,274 |
| Process 4 - ceased being looked after | 1 | 288 | 288 |
| Total social care cost | | | 37,798 |
| Age 18+ | | | |
| Ongoing support from leaving care personal adviser | 3 years | 139 | 21,684 |
| Additional work by leaving care personal adviser associated with each move | 6 moves | 68 | 408 |
| Supported lodgings payment ⁶ | 4 months | 170 (per week) | 2,890 |
| Total social care cost | | | 24,982 |
| Cost to other agencies | | | |
| Housing benefit ² | 3 years | 112.50 (per week) | 17,550 |
| Income support ³ | 18 months | 53 (per week) | 4,134 |
| Connexions ⁴ | 18 months | 16 (per session) | 1,248 |
| Psychologist ⁵ | 6 months | 81 (per week) | 2,106 |
| Total cost across other agencies | | | 25,038 |

¹ Process unit costs prior to age 18 are taken from Ward *et al.*, (2008) and inflated to 2010 -11 financial year.

² In recognition of the variability in the level of benefit between local areas a mid-point of benefit entitlement outlined by pilot authorities was used.

³ Based on the weekly benefit for a single person aged 16 – 24 (taken from www.direct.gov.uk).

⁴ Based on the costs outlined in Wylie and Smith (2004).

⁵ From Unit Costs of Health and Social Care (Curtis, 2010).

⁶ Based on Supported Lodgings Guidance prepared by DfE, DWP and HMRC.

As table 7.6 illustrates, Robert continued to receive support from a personal adviser post 18. The level of ongoing activity provided by the leaving care personal adviser was higher than for Catherine, because of the instability that Robert experienced once he had made the transition to independence. Robert not only received support from a leaving care personal adviser but also from other agencies. The proportion of costs incurred by children's social care post 18 was estimated to be around 50% of the total expenditure.

Christian

Christian met the eligibility criteria for staying put (having been placed with his foster carers since the age of seven). However, once he turned 18 he chose to live with his friend. This arrangement lasted for four months and then he opted to go and live with his birth mother. At the time of his interview he had been living there for four months.

Christian attended further education college for a few months while he was living with his friend. He then sought employment. Although there had been changes in his employment he was still working full time at the point of interview and with support from a teacher (accessed through his leaving care personal adviser) he was preparing his UCAS application with a view to attending university in the future.

Timeline for Christian

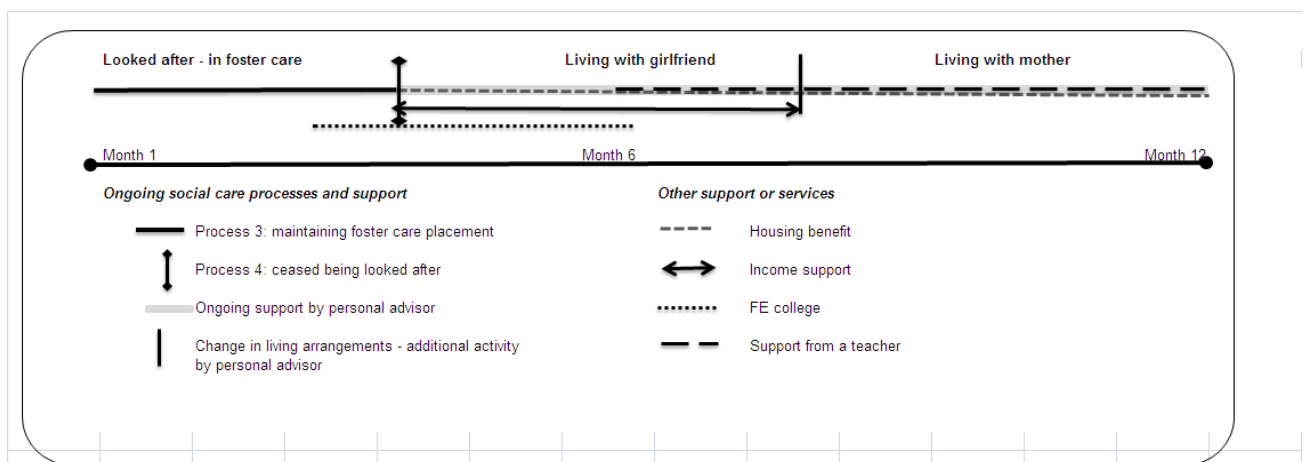


Table 7.7: Costs for Christian

| Social care case management costs | | | |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Prior to age 18¹ | | | |
| Process | Frequency/duration | Unit cost (£) | Subtotal (£) |
| Process 3 - maintain the placement | 4 years 4 months | 322 (per week) | 71,999 |
| Process 2 - care planning | 8 | 131 | 1,048 |
| Process 6 – review | 8 | 556 | 4,448 |
| Process 8 - leaving care services | 1 | 1274 | 1,274 |
| Process 4 - ceased being looked after | 1 | 288 | 288 |
| Total social care cost | | | 79,057 |
| Age 18+ | | | |
| Ongoing support from leaving care personal adviser | 8 months | 139 | 4,865 |
| Additional work by leaving care personal adviser associated with each move | 2 moves | 68 | 136 |
| Total social care cost | | | 5,001 |
| Cost to other agencies | | | |
| Housing benefit ² | 8 months | 112.50 (per week) | 3,938 |
| Income support ³ | 4 months | 53 (per week) | 901 |
| Support from teacher ⁴ | 6 months | 31 (per session) | 806 |
| Total cost across agencies | | | 5,645 |

¹Process unit costs prior to age 18 are taken from Ward *et al.*, (2008) and inflated to 2010-11 financial year.

² In recognition of the variability in the level of benefit between local areas a mid-point of benefit entitlement outlined by pilot authorities was used.

³ Based on the weekly benefit for a single person aged 16 – 24 (taken from www.direct.gov.uk).

⁴ Based on unit costs from Berridge *et al.* (2002).

Both Robert and Christian received a higher level of support from their leaving care personal adviser than Catherine because they experienced instability and change. The proportion of costs post 18 were relatively equally split between children’s social care and other agencies.

The three case study examples outlined above demonstrate how costs build up over time and also highlight how costs are incurred by different agencies. The two case study examples for Robert and Christian also illustrate how some young people experience instability in their housing and work or training arrangements post 18. Furthermore, calculation of the unit costs shows how ongoing support costs are increased for young people that are moving frequently.

Costs of rolling out staying put

One of the objectives of the pilot evaluation was to explore the costs of rolling out staying put nationally. As the report highlights there are variations in the payment models that authorities have implemented; funding arrangements are also influenced by young people's EET status and use of supporting people grants. These differences mean that extrapolation of the costs from the six in depth pilot authorities to a national cost will only provide a broad brush estimate of the costs of rolling out staying put.

Analysis of the MIS data from five authorities revealed that the proportion of young people that stayed put varied considerably between the pilot sites, with a range of between 15% and 56% (see Table 7.8). The totals included in Table 7.8 account for all the young people that stayed put over the three year pilot timeframe. The average number of young people that stayed put each year ranged from six to 16 in the pilot authorities. The national statistical returns demonstrate that there are substantial variations in the numbers of young people leaving care in different authorities; all but one of the pilot authorities included in Table 7.8 were large authorities with relatively high numbers of young people leaving care (Department for Education, 2011).

Table 7.8: Total number of young people staying put as a proportion of total eligible young people

| Authority | Stayed put – frequency (%) | | Total |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|-------|
| | Yes | No | |
| La A/T | 22 (15%) | 121 (85%) | 143 |
| La D | 48 (31%) | 107 (69%) | 155 |
| La L | 31 (19%) | 132 (81%) | 163 |
| La M | 20 (15%) | 114 (85%) | 134 |
| La N | 22 (56%) | 17 (44%) | 39 |
| Total | 143 (22.6%) | 491 | 634 |

The average proportion of young people staying put (over the three year period) across the pilot authorities was just under 23% (an average of 29 young people). This is in line with

figures for a similar scheme in Northern Ireland, where nearly 25% of young people are in Going the Extra Mile Schemes (National Care Advisory Service *et al.*, 2011b).

The average across the pilots can be used to estimate the national costs of rolling out staying put. The unit costs outlined in this report are multiplied by the average number of young people staying put. As reported earlier in this section there are a number of unit costs that could be used to calculate the national roll out costs. Although the costs of case management have been included in the calculations to carry out comparisons of different care pathways, the roll out cost estimates are based on the average payments funded by children's social care. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly the costs of the leaving care personal adviser supporting staying put placements are already accounted for because they would continue to support care leavers regardless of whether or not they stay put. Therefore, unless additional personal advisers would need to be recruited, inclusion of the costs of their case management activities would artificially inflate the roll out costs. Secondly, as outlined above a substantial proportion of the work to support staying put placements has been undertaken by the staying put manager. However, the pilot sites have reported that they plan to integrate staying put into mainstream services and will not continue to fund the staying put manager posts. Therefore the annual estimate of £7,105 has been used in the following calculations.

National statistical data on the number of young people looked after on their eighteenth birthday during the year ending 31 March 2011 and whose final placement was in foster care have been used to estimate the costs of rolling out staying put (Department for Education, 2011). During the 2010-11 financial year a total of 6,260 young people turned 18 and ceased to be looked after. Of these 37% were placed in foster care and thus around 2,350 young people could potentially be entitled to stay put. As previously outlined the average proportion of young people that opted to stay put in the pilot sites was 23%. This suggests that nationally a total of 530 young people (between three and four per local authority) might be expected to enter staying put arrangements in a given year. This number of young people has been used to form the basis of the national costs detailed in Table 7.9.

The length of time that the young people stayed put ranged from two weeks up to three years. Due to the timeframe of the evaluation there were a number of young people who were still in their staying put placements at the end of the evaluation and had only been in placement for a few months. These young people have been excluded from the calculations because the placements were ongoing and as such the final placement lengths are not known. Data on the length of ongoing and completed placements for young people in the interview sample are detailed in Appendix seven. The costs have been calculated using data

on the small sample of young people who had left staying put (completed placements); 22% of placements lasted less than six months, 33% lasted for between six and nine months and the remainder lasted for a year or more.

Table 7.9: Estimated social care costs of rolling out staying put (per annum)

| Number and % of young people | Placement length ¹ | Cost ² |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 115 (22%) | 13 weeks (for young people that stayed put up to six months) | £207,821 |
| 173 (33%) | 32.5 weeks (for young people that stayed put between six and nine months) | £777,109 |
| 235 (45%) | 52 weeks (for young people that stayed put for a year or more) | £1,690,990 |

¹ The mid-point has been used for the placement lengths.

² The costs have been calculated by multiplying the placement length and number of young people by the unit cost of £7,105 outlined on page 102.

The total estimated national social care cost of staying put per annum is in the region of two and a half million pounds (£2,675,921)³⁴ based on 530 care leavers staying put. Dividing this total national cost by the number of local authorities in England (152), this cost equates to an average of around £17,500 per local authority per year (based on between three and four care leavers staying put in each authority). This cost takes into account the placement lengths outlined above.

These costs may be offset over time as continuity and stability serve to minimise the risk of adverse outcomes and promote more positive life trajectories (Demos, 2010). Data from the US, based on observed differences between what happens in one US state (Illinois), which allows young people to remain in foster care until age 21, compared to two other states (Iowa and Wisconsin), where foster youth do not have this option estimates suggest a benefit-to-cost- ratio of almost two dollars in increased earnings due to higher rates of bachelor's degree completion for every one dollar spent on foster care beyond age 18 (Peters *et al.*, 2009). They conclude that:

³⁴ Based on 530 care leavers staying put

If states adopt a policy of allowing young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday... the potential benefits to foster youth and society will more than offset the costs to government (p.9).

Messages for policy and practice

- HM Revenue and Customs have announced changes to tax arrangements for carers looking after vulnerable individuals under the Shared Lives scheme. This establishes criteria governing who can be considered as a staying put carer. It does not state that young people have to have an 'established familial relationship' with their carers, thus facilitating the hybrid model of staying put. However, it does require young people to be in full time EET. This may inadvertently deny young people who would benefit from staying put the opportunity to do so and limits local authority discretion to make need based rather than criteria led decisions. However, HMRC are in the process of consulting on draft amendments to the specified social care schemes that are eligible for Qualifying Care Relief. One of the amendments is designed to ensure that carers of previously looked after children, who stay with their carers once they reach the age of 18, will continue to qualify for tax relief while the person cared for is aged 18 to 21, whether or not the person cared for is in full-time education.
- Fee and allowance payments to foster carers varied between local authorities as did the sources of this income. If the pilot is mainstreamed then it would be valuable to outline minimum allowances for carers and expectations concerning the contributions from social care, housing and other agencies. Regular payments from one source are also welcomed by carers (National Care Advisory Service *et al.*, 2011c).
- Decisions concerning the remuneration of Independent Fostering Agency carers once young people reach 18 are likely to influence whether or not foster carers feel willing or able to extend placements. These issues warrant consideration in the commissioning process and when placement decisions are taken.
- Leaving care personal advisers report higher levels of activity for young people who had moved to independence and especially those who experienced multiple housing moves (most commonly young people who had not stayed put).
- The contribution that children's social care made to placement fees/allowances varied between the in-depth pilot sites. The median was £137 per week.
- The total cost to social care of providing a staying put placement is estimated to be £14,278 although it might be anticipated that once the programme is embedded into practice this would fall to around £13,068 (includes case management process costs

and placement fee/allowance). This compares to an estimated annual cost of providing a foster placement to young people below 18, of £25,828.

- The total estimated national social care cost of staying put per annum is in the region of two and a half million pounds. This equates to an average of around £17,500 per local authority per year (based on between three and four care leavers staying put in each authority).
- This and other studies undertaken by CCFR have shown the importance of understanding how costs build over time (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008). Consequently, the long term impact of staying put on the costs incurred to social care and other agencies should be considered.
- The costs of staying put may be offset overtime by improved outcomes. Research from the US concluded that: *if states adopt a policy of allowing young people to remain in foster care until their 21st birthday... the potential benefits to foster youth and society will more than offset the cost to government* (Peters et al., 2009, p.9).

Chapter eight: Conclusion

I'd say stay put because it has just given me that much more support before I move out. Like, without that I really would have felt that I would have gone under; I think I would have crashed and burned (Michelle, stayed put).

That additional three years, you're grounding someone in adulthood and giving them that ability to move on as an adult, not move on as a child (foster carer, LA Q)

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a critical developmental stage and young people's experiences during this period contribute to shaping their future life chances. Historically care leavers have been expected to negotiate multiple changes in their lives (setting up and managing a home and finances as well as leaving school and moving into further education or employment) at a younger age than their peers in the general population and with limited support (Stein and Munro, 2008). In essence they experienced 'accelerated and compressed' journeys to adulthood and were expected to adjust to 'instant adulthood' (Stein, 2004). In practice both national and international research revealed that too many of these vulnerable young people experienced social exclusion and poor outcomes, including low educational attainment, unemployment, poverty, mental health problems, social isolation, homelessness, instability and involvement in crime as a result of this and their pre and in care experiences³⁵ (Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Biehal and Wade, 1999; Broad, 1999; Cashmore and Paxman, 1996; Courtney *et al.*, 2001; 2005; Munro, Stein and Ward, 2005; Stein *et al.*, 2000; Stein and Carey, 1986; Stein and Munro, 2008). The strategies that countries have employed to try and address these issues and fulfil their responsibilities as a corporate parent have varied, but the recent *United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* reiterates that States' responsibilities towards young people deprived of parental care extend into adulthood (Munro *et al.*, 2011b; Stein and Munro, 2008; United Nations General Assembly, 2010).

The Staying Put 18+ Family Placement Pilot Programme offered a cohort of young people the opportunity to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 and up to the age of 21. Findings from the pilot highlight a range of benefits of staying put, including the fact that it:

- empowers young people and gives them greater control of the timing of their transition from care to independence, rather than them feeling that they are being 'kicked out' of the system;

³⁵ Featuring for example, abuse and neglect, instability and change.

- means that young people are not penalised by virtue of their care status; they are offered the opportunity to experience transitions that are more akin to those experienced by their peers in the general population;
- allows young people to remain in a nurturing family environment with their foster carers (and offers continuity and stability); and
- this in turn provides an environment in which young people can:
 - mature and develop
 - prepare for independence
 - receive support and continue in EET.

In recognition of these benefits those who were involved in the pilot acknowledged the importance of the staying put programme and all the in-depth pilot authorities were in the process of mainstreaming it. The consensus was that investing in staying put foster placements was protective; it offered a framework to maximise the likelihood of young people succeeding and mitigated the risk of young people's circumstances deteriorating. This is beneficial to these young people but also to wider society. Those staying put were significantly more likely to be in full time education at 19 than their counterparts who did not stay put. A higher proportion of young people who stayed put were also pursuing higher education than those who did not (see also Courtney *et al.*, 2009). Higher educational attainment should yield cost savings in the future as these young people are in a position to earn more and pay more taxes. They are also likely to be less reliant on State support in later life. In contrast, over 40% of those who did not stay put were NEET a year after they left care. In-depth qualitative data on a small sample of young people also revealed that those who did not stay put were more likely to experience complex transition pathways and housing instability after they left care (see also Wade and Dixon, 2006; Stein, 2004). This is costly to the public purse but also has wellbeing costs for the young people concerned. Research from the US suggests that there are long term savings from extending entitlement to foster care until young people reach 21 years and these surpass the government investment needed to implement these programmes (Courtney *et al.*, 2009; Peters *et al.*, 2009).

Findings from the staying put pilots reveal different perspectives about who should be entitled to remain in foster care beyond 18. The majority of pilot authorities implemented a 'pure familial model' of staying put. In this model there was an expectation that young people would have an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carers. EET eligibility criteria were also introduced by all but one local authority. These eligibility criteria serve to influence which young people are entitled to stay. It was acknowledged that these

frameworks may deny the most vulnerable looked after children the opportunity to benefit from consistent care and support into adulthood. For example, late entrants to care who may have experienced longstanding abuse may not be offered the chance of extended compensatory care because they have not been in placement for long enough to have become 'part of the family'. However, high quality final placements can be therapeutic and assist young people to fulfil their potential, even when these commence late in a young person's care career (Barber and Delfabbro, 2004; Schofield, 2003; Schofield and Beek, 2009; Sinclair *et al.*, 2007).

Young people who experience placement changes precipitated by changes in foster carers' circumstances may also find themselves ineligible on the basis of decisions that they have no control over. Further, the condition that young people need to be in EET may mean that young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties connected to their past may be expected to make the transition from care to independence earlier than those with less complex needs. These examples illustrate how rigid criteria may reinforce the Inverse Care law with those in greatest need being denied opportunities that may promote more positive trajectories.

Foster carers' motivation to maintain placements post 18 and young people's willingness to stay put were strongly influenced by the quality of these relationships and the extent to which young people felt they belonged within the family unit. The majority of young people (15 out of 23, 65%) judged to have strong and secure base within their current foster placement opted to stay put and benefitted from more extensive networks of support to assist them in navigating the transition from care to adulthood. However it is also important to recognise that not all young people are willing or able to stay put. There is also a need to ensure that services and support are available to meet the needs of this group, particularly given that their circumstances will be shaped by pre-care experiences but also the quality of care planning and the goodness of fit between them and their foster carers. Young people's desire to be 'free' and 'independent' or to return to live with their birth families are also influential in young people's decisions. Professionals and foster carers have an important role to play in sensitising young people to the realities of living alone or returning to birth family given that findings from this and other studies reveal that these pathways are often challenging. In the words of one young man who benefitted from an extended period in foster care:

Stay put 'til you feel secure and emotionally and financially ready to move. Don't jump the gun. It may look nicer: the grass is not always greener on the other side, it's really not (Tim, stayed put).

Appendices

Appendix one: Calculation of unit costs

Background

Since 2000, CCFR have been engaged in a programme of research to explore the costs and outcomes of services provided to vulnerable children (Ward *et al.*, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, forthcoming). The research programme utilises a 'bottom up' approach to costing services (Beecham, 2000). Essentially all the costs are built up from an individual child level, based on all the support and services that an individual receives.

This approach identifies the personnel associated with each support activity, or service and estimates the time they spend on it. These amounts of time are costed using appropriate hourly rates. The method therefore links amounts of time spent to data concerning salaries, administrative and management overheads and other expenditure. A framework for costing overheads within children's services departments has also been developed and piloted as part of the wider programme of research (Selwyn *et al.*, 2009; Holmes *et al.*, 2010; Holmes and McDermid, forthcoming).

The methodology allows for the development of a detailed and transparent picture of the costs of providing a service, and of the elements that are necessary to support service delivery. The method also facilitates comparisons of costs and allows for exploration of variations in costs according to the needs of children, decision making processes and approaches to service delivery.

Method

Time use activity data to form the basis of the unit cost calculations was gathered from the six in-depth staying put pilot sites. The data was gathered both from focus groups and follow-up verification questionnaires. Focus groups were carried out in five of the six in-depth sites and were attended by a range of practitioners (see table a below). The focus groups provided an opportunity to explore some of the key practice issues that impacted on service delivery as well as providing some initial time use activity data to inform the development of the verification questionnaires.

Table a: Focus group participants

| Local authority | Focus group participants |
|------------------------|---|
| N | Staying put manager Supervising social worker Leaving care personal advisor Housing officer Pathway team manager |
| R | Staying put coordinator Leaving care personal adviser x 4 English churches worker |
| Q | Staying put manager Looked after children's manager |
| P | Staying put manager Leaving care personal adviser Administrator |
| L | Leaving care personal adviser x 3 Supervising social worker x 2 Specialist teacher Commissioning manager Trainee social worker Administrator |

Verification questionnaires were circulated to all six of the in-depth pilot sites. In total questionnaires were completed and returned by 10 leaving care personal advisers or social workers, two administrators and three staying put managers.

The time use activity data was compiled and analysed in Excel. The data was categorised according to a set of social care processes that are undertaken to support a young person in a staying put placement. The categorisation of activities in this way has been used extensively by the research team and is based on the *Core Information Requirements for Looked after Children* (Department of Health, 2003). The processes carried out to support looked after children are listed below.

Process 1: Decide child needs to be looked after and find first placement

Process 2: Care planning

Process 3: Maintaining the placement

Process 4: Cease to be looked after

Process 5: Find subsequent placement

Process 6: Review

Process 7: Legal

Process 8: Transition to leaving care services

The four processes highlighted grey are those that are pertinent to staying put placements, namely the decision for the child to stay put, maintaining the child in a staying put placement; child ceases to be looked after and also any placement reviews.

The time spent by practitioners on each of these processes is contained within the main evaluation report. To convert these times into unit costs they were multiplied by the hourly unit cost for each type of personnel, based on national salary scales for children's social care practitioners (see Curtis, 2010) and applying a percentage overhead (29%) to cover capital costs (see Curtis, 2010). The resultant unit costs for each of the four processes are again included in the main evaluation report.

Appendix two: Length of last care episode for those that were in foster care prior to staying put or leaving care

| | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| 0-6 months | 17 (13%) | 46 (20%) | 63 (18%) |
| 7-12 months | 12 (9%) | 21 (9%) | 33 (9%) |
| 13-18 months | 7 (5%) | 22 (10%) | 29 (8%) |
| 19-24 months | 16 (12%) | 18 (8%) | 34 (9%) |
| 25-48 months | 32 (24%) | 62 (27%) | 94 (26%) |
| 49-96 month | 28 (21%) | 45 (20%) | 73 (20%) |
| 97 months or more | 21 (16%) | 13 (6%) | 34 (9%) |
| Total | 133 (100%) | 227 (100%) | 360 (100%) |

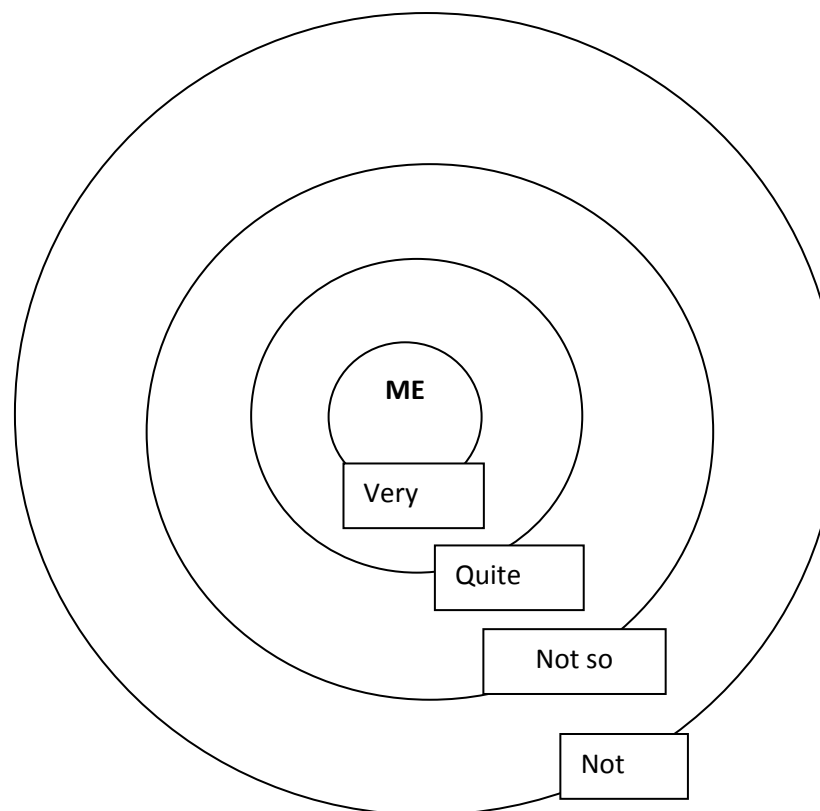
Appendix three: Circles diagram

CIRCLES DIAGRAM

Please think about the people you are close to, those who choose to help you, those whose job it is to support you, those who you are not close to.

Please place these people into the circles around you to help us understand how you feel about these relationships and which are most significant and/or important. Show them however you choose (e.g. crosses, faces, symbols) and please label them as best friend, neighbour, personal adviser, foster mum, etc, rather than real names. Feel free to make any changes to the diagram and label, add or take away circles or draw a different one if this one doesn't reflect your views or experiences and you can think of a better way of drawing it.

Thank you.



Appendix four: Activity at 19 according to whether or not young people stayed put

| Full time education | | | Part time education other than HE | | | Full time training or employment | | | Part time training or employment | | | NEET due to illness of disability | | | NEET because of other circumstances | | | Total |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | Stayed put | Did not stay put | All | |
| 54% (44) | 21% (55) | 29% (99) | 4% (3) | 6% (15) | 5% (18) | 26% (21) | 14% (36) | 17% (57) | 5% (4) | 11% (27) | 9% (31) | 1% (1) | 3% (8) | 3% (9) | 11% (9) | 45% (116) | 37% (125) | 339 (100%) |

Appendix five: Pathways and the first factor to precipitate a change in living arrangements at 16+ (Munro *et al.*, 2011)

| | Direct pathway | Transitional placement pathway | Complex pathway | Total |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Young person led | 1 (13%) | 5 (63%) | 2 (25%) | 8 (101%) |
| Age related | 1 (25%) | 2 (50%) | 1 (25%) | 4 (100%) |
| Breakdown or multiple reasons | 1 (20%) | 1 (20%) | 3 (60%) | 5 (100%) |
| Total | 3 (18%) | 8 (47%) | 6 (35%) | 17 (100%) |

*missing data on the reasons for moves for three young people in the transitional placement pathway group

Appendix six: Funding and set-up costs

The proportion of funding per pilot was based on the number of young people aged 18+ for whom it intended to provide staying put family based placements. DfE outlined that the funding might be used for the following purposes:

- contributing to costs of staying put placements;
- funding recruitment, training, management and support of staying put carers; and
- funding overall fostering activity to create new placement capacity to free up current cases to operate as staying put carers.

The pilot authorities were required to submit quarterly returns to DfE to outline headline facts and figures and provide a breakdown of the following: finances; the recruitment and support process; training; tax, benefits and young persons' contributions; young persons' views and outcomes; progress against project plan; outstanding issues or concerns.

Four out of six in-depth sites and a further four pilot authorities supplied data to DfE but not all submitted returns for each quarter. There were also variations in the level of detail local authorities provided thus limiting opportunities for comparison. However, it was clear that each authority had used some of their funding to create a staying put manager post although the role and remit of managers in these positions varied between local authorities.

Data from the quarterly returns did reveal that two sites had overspent on their budget during the last year of the pilot³⁶. In LA P the number of young people staying put was higher than anticipated; they estimated that 33% of young people would stay put and 85% did so. It was not clear why LA B had overspent. Where there was an overspend funds were made up using monies from mainstream budgets.

In addition to the funds provided by DfE most of the pilots were dependent on supporting people funding, however, LA Q indicated that within their area staying put placements were not eligible for supporting people funding.

Appendix seven: Length of staying put placements

Table b: length of time young people stayed put before moving to independence, during the course of the evaluation

| Length of placement | Number of young people |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Under 6 months | 1 |
| 6 months to 1 year | 5 |
| 13 months to 2 years | 3 |
| 25 months + | 0 |
| Total | 9 |

Table c: length of ongoing staying put placements during the course of the evaluation

| Length of placement | Number of young people |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Under 6 months | 0 |
| 6 months to 1 year | 7 |
| 13 months to 2 years | 5 |
| 25 months + | 1 |
| Missing | 1 |
| Total | 14 |

³⁶ There may be others that overspent but did not provide details.

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ISBN: 978-1-78105-063-7

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February 2012