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## Evaluation of the Right2BCared4 pilots interim report: Overview of emerging themes and issues

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### Background

The Right2BCared4 pilot began in October 2007 in 11 local authorities and is based on the following principles:

- Young people should not be expected to leave care until they reach 18 years old;
- They should have a greater say in the decision making process preceding their exit from care; and
- Should be properly prepared for living independently.

Key to this pilot is that the transition from care to independence should be planned and properly managed, that young people should be consulted about their wishes and feelings and that they should have access to independent advocacy.

This interim report presents findings from a mapping exercise and focus groups undertaken between January and June 2009 with social workers, personal advisers, independent reviewing officers (IROs) and other key professionals from each of the pilot sites, to explore:

- How each of the pilot sites planned to meet the objectives of Right2BCared4 and any changes compared to plans submitted to the former Department for Children, Schools and Families; and
- Early benefits and challenges since implementation.

### Key Findings from the Interim Report

The interim report provides a *preliminary* insight into the *early* benefits and challenges of Right2BCared4 from *the perspective of those professionals involved in its planning and implementation*.

Right2BCared4 is based upon key principles, rather than a single intervention and a range of approaches have been adopted by authorities to meet the objectives of the pilot. Developments and changes in each local authority need to be understood within the wider context of the area's existing services. The boundaries between leaving care provision to meet the requirements of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, organisational responses to the *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DfES, 2007), the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (see: <http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5344-10767.pdf>) and Right2BCared4 are blurred and making comparisons between different authorities 'pre' and 'post' implementation is challenging.

### *Pre-existing policy and practice*

- Prior to Right2BCared4 over half of the pilot local authorities' already encouraged young people to stay in care until they reached the age of 18.
- Eight local authorities indicated that they brought forward reviews, if necessary, in response to changes in young people's circumstances.
- All the pilot sites had supported accommodation options available, including shared housing and self-contained flats with either on-site or visiting support.

### *Young people's entitlement to remain in care until they reach legal adulthood*

- The pilot was perceived to have increased local authorities willingness to provide *appropriate* accommodation for young people up until they reach 18.
- The way in which information about independence was presented to young people was perceived to be changing in some local authorities, with increased emphasis being placed upon young people's entitlement to stay in care.
- Offering the option for young people to return to care if they left before the age of 18 and encountered difficulties was seen to offer an important 'safety net' and more closely models the approach that many parents would adopt with their own children (see also, Munro et al., 2010).

### *Training or 'taster' flats and renewed emphasis on the role of carers in preparing young people for independence*

- Four local authorities extended their accommodation provision under Right2BCared4, introducing training/taster flats<sup>1</sup> or a residential unit.
- Training/taster flats were deemed to have a number of benefits, offering young people a 'taste of independence' whilst allowing them to return to their main placement afterwards. Professionals were also able to obtain a better insight into what additional skills and support young people may need in the future to prepare them for independence.

### *Young people's wishes and local authority capacity to secure and maintain placements*

- Not all young people want to remain in care longer, irrespective of what professionals perceive to be in their best interest.
- The opportunity to allow young people to return to care was seen as a positive development; however foster care shortages meant that it was rarely possible for a young person to return to their previous foster or residential placement.
- Challenges were experienced by professionals trying to sustain placements as this was conditional not only on the young person wanting to stay, but also on foster carers or residential units being willing and able to care for the young person (see also, Munro et al., 2010).
- Trying to secure placements for young people with complex needs can be resource intensive and placement costs can be high (Ward et al., 2008). This has wider cost implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Training/taster flats offer the opportunity to experience what it is like to live independently before leaving care to move to independent accommodation. The flats temporarily accommodate one young person at a time and support is provided by visiting or onsite staff.

## *Management of the transition to adulthood*

- Some professionals raised concerns that Right2BCared4 had not resolved the problems that can be encountered in managing the *transition process* and that legislation and age related entitlement rules were still causing difficulties. For example:
- Local authorities identified practical difficulties in providing ongoing support once young people reached 18. These included residential units being in breach of their registration if they extended placements and financial, tax and benefit issues for foster carers continuing to care for young people post 18 (see also, Munro et al., 2010).
- One authority highlighted that the transfer of responsibility for accommodation from children's services to housing was problematic.
- Concerns were expressed that foster carers were overprotecting young people in their care, leaving them ill equipped for living independently (see also, Munro et al., 2010).

## *The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)*

- Right2BCared4 introduced measures designed to strengthen the role of the IRO, including appointing a named IRO for each young person and requiring the IRO to consult with young people prior to their review to establish their wishes and feelings.
- The enhanced IRO role was deemed by professionals to have improved scrutiny of care plans and allowed workers to spend more time with young people prior to their reviews.
- It was also suggested that policies strengthening notification procedures, to ensure that IROs are aware of significant changes, had given them leverage to challenge local authority plans if these were not perceived to be in the young person's best interests.
- IROs need to work collaboratively with social workers, however they must feel able to challenge them if the young person's care plans are not seen to be in their best interests, or if there are delays in the decision making process. This had caused tensions in some pilot sites, with social workers feeling that IROs were taking over their case management responsibility and that their practice was under constant scrutiny.
- The benefits of additional reviews were deemed to be dependent upon the ability to actively engage young people and empower them to take control of the review and decide where it should be held and who should be invited.

## **Next steps**

The interim report offers a preliminary insight into early benefits and challenges of Right2BCared4 from the perspective of those involved in planning and implementing it. Work is underway to ascertain young people's views and experiences (via a survey and face to face interviews). Data are also being collected from case records and interviews with social workers and IROs. The costs of operating Right2BCared4 compared with standard leaving care services are also being examined.

## **References**

Munro E.R, Maskell-Graham D, Ward H and National Care Advisory Service. (2010). *Evaluation of the Staying Put 18+ Family Placement Pilot Programme Interim Report: Overview of Emerging Themes and Issues*. London: DFE.

Ward H, Holmes L and Soper J. (2008). *Costs and Consequences of Placing Children in Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

### **Additional Information**

Copies of all of the reports can be downloaded free of charge at  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/research/>

Further information about this research can be obtained from Paul Denis,  
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This research report was written 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.