
Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Pilot Programme Interim Report: Overview of Emerging Themes and Issues

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Background

The Staying Put pilot, which began in 11 local authorities in July 2008, is targeted at young people who have established 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.

The interim report presents findings from a mapping exercise and face-to-face interviews conducted between December 2009 and April 2010 with managers responsible for implementing Staying Put in each of the 11 pilot authorities, to explore:

- How authorities are actually implementing Staying Put (and any changes compared to plans submitted to the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)); and
- Challenges and issues that they are facing in implementing Staying Put in practice.

Key findings from the Interim Report

Pre-existing practice

- Prior to the implementation of Staying Put all of the pilot authorities had already begun to allow some young people to remain with their carers post- 18 years. Decisions tended to be taken on an ad-hoc basis and predominately for young people remaining in education.
- Three local authorities also offered placement extensions for young people with disabilities.

Staying Put models of delivery

- There are variations in perspectives about which young people could or should be eligible to remain with carers up to the age of 21. In the majority of local authorities 'established' relationships¹ with carers were a pre-condition for remaining in placement post- 18.
- Most pilot authorities have 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 closely replicate the experiences of young people in the general population and adheres closely to the original tender specification issued by DCSF.
- A '*hybrid*' model has been 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 the carer prior to the age of 18 to be eligible to Stay Put.

Conditions of eligibility

- Staying Put aims to provide 'the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment'.
- Engagement in education, employment and training (EET) is a pre-requisite for inclusion in Staying Put in some authorities. However, in others less strict criteria have been applied. Staying Put may offer an opportunity to encourage young people who were not engaged to re-engage in EET.
- Some interviewees expressed concern that requiring people to be engaged in EET 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.

Replicating normative transitions

- Early indications suggest that many young people are Staying Put for relatively short periods. Removing the requirement that young people must leave placements at 18 means young people are more in control of the process.
- Professionals perceived that offering young people greater choice and flexibility about when they leave, rather than requiring them to move at an externally imposed and predefined time (related to age rather than circumstance) was beneficial for them.
- A number of authorities try to afford young people the right to return to care placements if the transition to independence raises unforeseen challenges or young people's plans or circumstances change. While young people may be able to return (albeit within varying timescales and depending on local authority policies) it may not be possible for young people to return to their former carers. Similar issues have been identified in the evaluation of Right2BCared4 (Munro et al., 2010).

Renegotiating expectations post 18

- 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.
- Local authorities indicated that foster carers may still struggle with how best to support young people to prepare for independent living. They identified that preparation for independence should begin earlier and that foster carers needed specialist support and training to facilitate

¹ 'Established' and 'familial' relationships were not explicitly defined during interview

this. Some pilot sites are developing specialist provision through the pilot (see also Munro et al., 2010).

Taxation and benefits issues

One of the aims of the Staying Put pilots was to explore how insurance, tax and benefit issues and other barriers to implementation could be resolved.

Taxation issues

- Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Finance Bill, a new tax relief scheme, Shared Lives, will be applied retrospectively from 6 April 2010. This has the potential to clarify and simplify tax relief arrangements for Staying Put carers.
- However, it is unclear what criteria HM Revenue and Customs will use to assess what constitutes a Staying Put placement for the purposes of tax relief. The evaluation so far has shown that Staying Put pilots have adopted different positions on what constitutes a Staying Put placement. It is possible that some placements currently offered may fall outside the HMRC definition.

Benefits issues

- Young adults in Staying Put placements attending higher education and university are not usually entitled to benefits but have access to a range of other financial support. Other young adults who wish to access basic or 'second chance' learning are currently subject to *time-limited* access to benefits which may serve as a disincentive.
- Decisions concerning whether young adults who Stay Put are entitled to housing benefit have varied between pilot sites. Entitlement to housing benefit has presented major challenges for some pilot sites whilst others have had no difficulties in accessing local housing allowances.
- There were different perspectives concerning whether or not care leavers should be expected to claim benefits, regardless of their entitlement.

Financial arrangements for carers and young people

- Pilot authorities have adopted a range of payment models for Staying Put carers ranging from a continuation of the previous fostering arrangement pre-18 to a completely new fee structure.
- While some carers continue on the same or similar remuneration packages, other carers within Staying Put now receive less financial reward for offering a Staying Put placement.
- Most pilot authorities agree with the principle that young people should contribute to their placements although the protocols for doing so are not necessarily agreed and in place.
- In order to access other benefits to "top-up" Staying Put placements, interviews revealed that young adults and their carers might have to establish a formal business or contractual relationship such as "landlord" and "excluded licensee".

Next steps

The next phase of the study will involve the collection of management information system (MIS) data on two cohorts of young people. This will facilitate analysis of similarities and differences in outcomes for young people who have Stayed Put compared to those who chose not to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 and those who did not have the option to do so (pre-pilot cohort).

In-depth work will also be undertaken in six of the pilot sites using a mixed methods approach. Former care leavers, trained as peer researchers, will interview young people to explore the views and experiences of those who Stayed Put, those who opted to move to independence and those whose foster carers felt unable to maintain placements for them once they reached 18. The perspectives of their personal advisors and foster carers will also be sought. A bottom up costing methodology (Beecham, 2000) will be employed to examine the costs of the pilot compared to standard provision and set these against outcomes. The costs of rolling out the programme will also be explored.

References

Beecham, J. (2000) *Unit costs – not exactly child's play: A guide to estimating unit costs for Children's Social Care*. University of Kent: Department of Health, Dartington Social Research Unit and the Personal Social Services Research Unit.

Munro, E.R., Ward, H., Lushey, C. and National Care Advisory Service (2010) *Evaluation of the Right2BCared4 pilots interim report: Overview of emerging themes and issues*. London: DFE.

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).

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