



Department
for Education

Staying Close North Tyneside (pilot)

Evaluation report

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Contents

List of figures	4
List of tables	4
Acknowledgements	5
Young person-friendly summary	6
What we found in interviews:	6
Main points and the future	6
Key messages	7
Executive summary	8
Introduction	8
The project	8
The evaluation	8
Key findings	9
Lessons and implications	10
1. Introduction	11
Note on terminology	11
2. Overview of the project	13
Scheme context and description	13
Theory of change	14
3. Overview of the evaluation	16
Evaluation aims	16
Evaluation questions	17
Evaluation methods	19
Changes to evaluation methods	19
Limitations of the evaluation	20
4. Implementation evaluation	21
Methods summary	21
Findings	21
The Staying Close Offer	21

Innovation	24
Expectations and experiences	25
Implementation successes and challenges	26
Transition as a journey	28
Relationships between professionals/agencies	29
Reflections on the theory of change	29
Limitations	33
Conclusions	33
6. Voice of young people	35
Methods summary	35
Findings	35
Limitations	36
Conclusions	36
7. Summary of key findings on seven practice features and seven outcomes	37
8. Conclusions and recommendations	38
Appendix 1: Theory of Change	40
References	42

List of figures

Figure 1: Theory of Change

List of tables

Table 1: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations)

Table 2: Research questions (pilot specific)

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Young person-friendly summary

Staying Close is a new project, which seeks to improve the lives of young people when they're moving out of children's homes and don't have the support they need. This can include providing support in areas like independent living, education, jobs and training, stability, safety, health and wellbeing, and having enough money and using it well. To understand if Staying Close is helpful, we interviewed staff and young people about their feelings towards Staying Close, and interviewed each three times over a two-year period.

What we found in interviews:

How does Staying Close support young people?

Staying Close wants to help young people leaving children's homes. Elm House is next to Sycamore House, the children's home which young people have lived in before. But there is support offered in other areas, such as gym membership and paying tax.

Has Staying Close been done before?

Staff members said that the help provided by Staying Close had not been used as often before. They said that young people had been asked to talk about how they felt about housing provided by Staying Close:

“Yeah, they do have meetings here – it's what is called a young people's meeting – and you bring up what you want to change, and the staff bring up what has been changed and what could change ...” (*Young person 10, peer interview*)

As well as help finding a home, young people said that relationships were very important. They want someone who really cares about them, is available often, and helps them slowly become more independent.

Main points and the future

Staying Close is a positive addition to children's homes, and young people who get the support. Young people have safe and comfortable housing, some of this hasn't been done before by other projects. North Tyneside tries to make sure young people can give their opinion and it is important that young people feel supported and heard. Some young people might need longer before moving to live alone, or more contact with a Staying Close worker. Young people asked here were happy about getting to use the gym, being more in charge of their own health and wellbeing. Staff have ways to help young people get into education, find a job or training. This support can change – for the different wants and needs of young people

Key messages

1. Offering a **range of accommodation** is key. Young people's circumstances vary and it is important that Staying Close can meet their needs appropriately. This includes flexibility with some people transitioning towards greater independence more rapidly than others.
2. The accommodation offer needs to recognise the need for a **safe space** for young people to learn important independent living skills. North Tyneside have gone some way towards achieving this.
3. The pilot model has been essential in allowing the offer to be **tested and developed** over time. North Tyneside have developed their offer in response to their experiences.
4. The Staying Close scheme in North Tyneside would benefit from a more developed means of **collecting progress and outcome data**. In particular, the data collected should relate directly to their theory of change and provide opportunity to develop insights into whether their programmes are working.
5. North Tyneside's model is an extension of the children's home model but follows a **youth homelessness model** with gradations of support that allow young people to move towards their own tenancy at their own pace.
6. Staying Close workers are able to provide a sense of consistency and continuity to young people leaving care. However, workers are not always formally trained to support the specific emotional, psychological, social, or practical needs that can characterise and define the leaving care experience. **Amendments to current formal training programmes for children's homes carers and managers could be extended to consider the specific, effective and integrated approaches that are needed to support care leavers.**
7. Staying Close provides the continuity of a trusted relationship between the young person and the members of staff who were involved in their care before they left the children's home. However, the addition of the Staying Close worker to existing formal leaving care services means **that the purpose and function of the new role are not always understood** by the young people. The development of the Staying Close offer permits the conduct of potential future research and policies to better guide the integration of the Staying Close project between social care workforce and health, education and housing providers.

Executive summary

Introduction

Staying Close is a pilot programme that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning from residential care. It aims to address the 'cliff edge' faced by young people leaving residential care by improving and extending the support provided by local authorities during their transition to independent adulthood. The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways by local authorities, both reflecting local priorities and also the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

The project

There are two elements that are core to Staying Close in North Tyneside. First, there is an accommodation offer, aimed at providing accommodation that is suitable and close to the young person's previous children's home. Second, there is a support offer that focuses on maintaining relationships with staff at the young person's previous children's home and providing emotional and practical support during the transition to independent adulthood.

The evaluation

The evaluation took place over three points in time: scoping, mid-point, and final phase. A range of data collection and analysis methods were used during this evaluation:

- scoping interviews with project leads;
- a theory of change workshop, during the scoping phase, with key participants;
- a young person's co-production workshop with seven participants (five currently in receipt of Staying Close, two preparing to transition from the children's home);
- interviews with project stakeholders (six at mid-point and four in the final phase);
- an online stakeholder survey conducted at two points (seven responses at midpoint and three at end point);
- responses to the young people's online survey conducted at two points (zero at midpoint and two at end point);
- some monthly meeting notes and internal reports coded for thematic analysis;
- four peer-led interviews completed and four researcher-led interviews with young people; and
- qualitative coding of all textual materials (interview transcripts, documents and reports, and open-text responses to survey questions), and thematic analysis.

In addition to this, a cost analysis and distance travelled analysis were intended to be undertaken. However, because of the very small numbers of young people accessing Staying Close in North Tyneside and in agreement with the Department for Education, these elements of the evaluation were not progressed. Instead, the analysis focuses entirely on qualitative data.

Key findings

1. The Staying Close offer

North Tyneside Staying Close aims to provide a series of stepping-stones for young people leaving care. Currently, the provision includes Elm House, a six bedroom, fully staffed house owned by children's services, a two bedroom local authority flat (with options to engage several other local authority flats for Staying Close), and a range of 'floating' or 'outreach' services. These floating services vary and are tailored to the young person's needs on leaving supported accommodation allowing them to develop an action plan for maintaining contact. They can include anything from agreements for regular phone calls to engaging with specific programmes.

2. Innovation

According to staff interviewed, Elm House provided a type of support for the young people that previously did not exist in the authority, and this fitted with their plans for developing a means of transitioning young people from care to living independently within a supportive network.

3. Expectations and experiences

The interim report highlighted some difficulties around managing the expectations and experiences of the young people. The young people who were interviewed in later stages of the evaluation had a positive view of the experience of living in Elm House. The different types of support required were met by staff taking a flexible approach to how they supported them. During feedback, some young people did express concerns about the limitations of the support at Elm House and the changes in staffing over the course of the two years. However, there was some indication that staff were aware of difficulties and they were taking proactive steps to develop appropriate support and manage the expectations of the young people. It is important that in making these changes the young people were given the chance to express their needs, and, where possible, to co-produce any solutions.

4. Implementation successes and challenges

There is clear evidence that the pilot is continuing to develop and enhance their offer by learning from experience. A key challenge for staff was the proximity of Elm House to the original children's home. Elm House is located at the end of the drive from Sycamore

House (one of the borough's children's homes). Interviewees suggested that this did offer some benefits including enabling staff to work in both homes without difficulty and young people maintaining familiarity with the area. However, the challenge was in differentiating between the children's home and Elm House (which was part of the Staying Close transition offer). Young people sometimes struggled to understand the difference between being in the children's home and Elm House as it looked similar and involved the same staff. In particular, staff interviewed discussed the need for a 'change in culture' in terms of the way they worked with the young people at Elm House which took some time to embed. Again, the research indicates that North Tyneside have been successful in developing their offer to be more suitable in encouraging living independently and developing a supportive network.

5. Transitions as a journey

Professionals interviewed had a clear understanding of the need to offer nuanced and flexible support for young people transitioning from care to independent living. The programmes available within Elm House offer a base for young people to develop independent living skills (these include being 'rent ready', and money management) but the staff also provide support for their individual needs and interests. The staff have developed a new life skills programme that will begin with young people before they leave children's homes. This will be planned to begin in summer 2020.

6. Relationships between professionals.

The interdependence-informed approach to the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside enables young adults to engage with a named Staying Close worker who can help create a sense of stability. Whilst personal advisors, social workers, and housing officers have a particular function to provide advice, assess, implement and review the pathway plan, they can also be a stranger to the young person. As a relatively small local authority, staff interviews suggest that having a named Staying Close worker has allowed North Tyneside to develop good relationships across agencies, allowing them to work together to develop a suitable offer.

Lessons and implications

1. The this evaluation report highlights a number of examples of good practice within leaving care services in North Tyneside. These include having a range of accommodation offers (Elm House, supported living, and floating support for those living more independently); and co-producing support and contact plans with young people.
2. Modification to current formal training programmes for children's homes care workers and managers is needed and should be extended to consider the specific, effective, and integrated approaches that are needed to support care leavers.

1. Introduction

Staying Close is a pilot programme that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning from residential care. It aims to address the 'cliff edge' faced by young people leaving residential care by improving and extending the support provided by local authorities during their transition to independent adulthood. The pilot programme is intended to contribute to five outcome areas for young people transitioning from care: independent living; access to education, employment and training (EET); stability, feeling safe and secure; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability (DfE, 2018). The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways by local authorities, both reflecting local priorities and also the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

There is a significant body of evidence, both in the UK and internationally, that shows that young people transitioning from care to independent adulthood face a number of challenges (Bengtsson et al., 2018). Their transition to adulthood is shorter, and occurs at a younger age compared to their peers, in a form of 'instant adulthood' (Rogers, 2011). Young people transitioning from care often lack access to family support during this transition. It has long been recognised that young people leaving residential care face significant challenges and often achieve poorer outcomes than other young adults (Adley and Jupp Kina, 2017). Evidence demonstrates that young people with a history of local authority care (of which residential care is one part) have poorer social outcomes in adulthood when compared with peers who have not been under local authority care (HM Government, 2016). They often experience instability in their housing, and are over-represented in homeless populations (O'Leary, Ozan and Bradbury, 2017).

This report is the second and final report, and focuses on the pilot Staying Close scheme run by North Tyneside Council. The report provides insights into the design and implementation of the North Tyneside pilot. It focuses on the Staying Close offer and how it is delivered in North Tyneside, the successes and challenges experienced in its implementation, and the views of the staff and young people involved in Staying Close in the area. An important part of the evaluation reported here is the involvement of young people; in the evaluation design, as peer researchers, as research participants, and as stakeholders.

Note on terminology

This report is one of five reports written by evaluators at Manchester Metropolitan University. For uniformity and clarity, the research team has taken some decisions regarding the use of terminology throughout the reports. The reports will refer to '**children's homes**' as opposed to residential home or care home when referring to the homes that the young people have left from the age of 16. There are two reasons for this.

The first is to distinguish between the homes or residences relating to the Staying Close project and the second is in response to how the young people have referred to their homes throughout their responses to this research. The reports will refer to **young person with experience of care**. For brevity, 'young person' will be used to refer to research participants, as it is understood those interviewed are care experienced.

2. Overview of the project

Scheme context and description

North Tyneside local authority is located in the North East of England. It is a relatively small local authority, covering a population of around 200,000 people. The North East has the second lowest income, and a high rate of deprivation in England with child poverty rates rising since 2012 with around 20-30% of children in North Tyneside considered to be in poverty (Bradshaw, 2020). In relation to looked after children, some 74 out of 10,000 children are looked after by the authority, which is similar to national rates (69 in 10,000). This rate has been growing across England over the last five years, but the rate of growth in the borough has been significantly greater than the national and regional growth (LGA, 2020). There are two children's homes in North Tyneside Borough Council (both local authority), Sycamore House and Riverdale House. Each of these homes currently houses around five young people in care. In 2019, 29 children left care in the borough (DfE, 2020a) (which includes children who were adopted or whose care order was ended before the age of 16). Given this, the number of young people leaving residential care in any year is small, usually fewer than five. The Staying Close pilot is directly delivered by the local authority.

There are two elements that are core to Staying Close in North Tyneside. There is an accommodation offer, aimed at providing accommodation that is suitable and close to the young person's previous children's home and, secondly, a support offer, that focuses on maintaining relationships with staff at the young person's previous children's home and providing emotional and practical support during the transition to independent adulthood. The accommodation aspect focuses on a six-bedroom house purposefully refurbished for the pilot. This property, Elm House, is located a few hundred metres away from one of the borough's children's homes. In addition to this, the Staying Close offer has access to six local authority flats, one of which is currently dedicated to Staying Close. However, Staying Close works closely with the Leaving Care pathway (with a single person having overall responsibility for both) such that other flats can be made available when required. The support offer involves a range of programmes and opportunities for those living within Staying Close accommodation and an 'outreach' offer for those who have left to maintain contact with the Staying Close team when they move on.

The pilot programme is intended to contribute to five outcome areas for young people transitioning from care: independent living; access to education, employment and training (EET); stability, feeling safe and secure; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability (DfE, 2018). The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways by local authorities, both reflecting local priorities and the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

The ultimate intended outcome for Staying Close in North Tyneside is to increase young care leavers' independence. The Staying Close project in North Tyneside has the stated objectives of enabling young care leavers to:

- access suitable and stable accommodation;
- access education, employment or training;
- improve their health and wellbeing;
- be supported during the transition from care;
- have improved readiness for independent living;
- have improved resilience to unsafe behaviours; and
- have improved social connections and greater social integration.

North Tyneside Council has worked to integrate the offer into the overall pathway for all care leavers, ensuring that all projects work closely. North Tyneside Staying Close therefore runs in parallel with other projects such as Connexions (employment and training) and Crisis (mental health support).

Theory of change

As part of the process of bidding for funding under the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme), projects were asked to submit a 'theory of change'; an explanatory model that outlines how or through what, mechanisms and resource use the intended outcomes of the programme would be achieved. The Spring Consortium were appointed by the Department for Education to provide support to the development of theories of change during this bidding process.

Through the early stages of the evaluation, the research team worked with Staying Close pilots (including North Tyneside) to further develop and reflect on their theories of change. Through workshops, follow up discussions, and interviews, individuals involved in the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot articulated and validated the schematic presented in Appendix 1. This process provided a space through which schemes could reflect on the original proposals and make amendments as necessary to account for changes in scheme implementation; to better articulate the causal pathways through which the intended outcomes would be achieved, and help the evaluation team develop a deep understanding the pilot schemes, both individually and comparatively.

There has been a degree of change in thinking about how the intervention is intended to work. This change of thinking can be seen by comparing the theory of change developed as part of the bid process for Staying Close and the one developed as part of the scoping phase of this evaluation. These differences might be explained by the different purposes for, and process of creating, the two models. The bid theory of change focuses on 'activity-output-outcome' chains, whilst the evaluation theory of changes focuses on causal pathways through which outcomes will be delivered.

The evaluation model suggests that North Tyneside has reflected on and refined the outcomes it sees as being achievable through Staying Close, with the long term aim of supporting young adults leaving residential care to become independent adults.

However, in comparison to other Staying Close pilots being evaluated by the Manchester Metropolitan University team, there is one feature of Staying Close in North Tyneside that has not changed in relation to the accommodation offer. From the outset, the intention behind Staying Close in the borough was the provision of a purpose-refurbished six-bedroom shared house, within close proximity to one of the borough's two children's homes.

3. Overview of the evaluation

There are eight Staying Close pilots funded under the Innovation Programme. The pilot programme was intended to test the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of Staying Close, and identify what should be core to the Staying Close offer. Five of the pilots are being evaluated by a team at Manchester Metropolitan University; three are being evaluated by a team at the universities of York and Oxford. Five of the pilots are being delivered directly by local authorities, with the other three being delivered by charities.

The North Tyneside evaluation is a theory-based examination of process and experience, using a mixture of qualitative methods such as workshops, interviews, focus groups and online surveys of young people (including some young people who have already left the council's care), and key practitioners and managers at three points in time over two years. A key aim of the national evaluation of the Innovation Programme (of which this evaluation is one part) was to measure impact. However, the evaluation team raised significant concerns about the feasibility of such an approach in the context of North Tyneside's very small numbers of young people leaving residential care, and the usefulness (both to policy-makers and practitioners) and robustness of any impact evaluation undertaken. It was decided in agreement with the Department for Education that an impact evaluation would be infeasible in the context of North Tyneside's very small numbers of young people leaving residential care. This evaluation comprises three elements:

- theory-based evaluation to assess and understand whether and how elements of the Staying Close programme contribute to the expected outcomes. Data collection took place at three time points;
- process evaluation; and
- peer research, engaging with young people who have left, or are leaving, residential care both as service users and as peer researchers, to understand the experience of young people accessing Staying Close.

Evaluation aims

There were two key aims of the evaluation reported here. The first was that the evaluations should follow a consistent approach to that used in the other seven evaluations, to enable comparison between the pilots. The North Tyneside evaluation met this aim, albeit that the approach did not include the outcome or cost analysis elements. The second key aim was that the evaluation should give voice to young people leaving, or preparing to leave, residential care.

The evaluation in North Tyneside was a theory-based examination, using a mixture of qualitative methods, of process and experience.

Evaluation questions

There are a series of core questions that are common to all of the Staying Close evaluations. There are also research questions that are specific to Staying Close in North Tyneside, reflecting variation between the schemes, their local context, objectives, existing service provision, and scheme design. The evaluation questions cover the implementation of the pilot; and the voice, experience and expectations of young people accessing Staying Close services. The core research questions for the Staying Close evaluations are in the following table.

Table 1: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations)

Number	Research Questions	Section
1	To what extent are the planned developments achieved? What was in place previously and what needs to be in place to facilitate successful implementation?	Findings: Staying Close Offer
2	How have young people, and other stakeholders, been involved in the co-production of the model?	Findings (throughout) and Voice of the Young People
3	Have support plans been developed and implemented as anticipated? Has there been meaningful contact with an identified worker?	Findings: Staying Close Offer and Findings: Expectations and Experiences
4	Has the staff training been rolled out effectively and what has been its impact from staff perspectives? For example, improved knowledge and understanding of needs of young people leaving residential care	Findings: Success and Challenges
5	What are the costs of delivering the Staying Close intervention and what are the potential cost savings?	Not answerable
6	What are the experiences of young people in residential care who do not access the interventions?	Not answerable

Table 1 (continued): Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations)

Number	Research Questions	Section
7	<p>What is the impact of Staying Close on outcomes for care leavers? What proportion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are in accommodation that is suitable (safe, secure and affordable) and stable (with reference to unplanned moves or disruptions in tenancies) b. Are in education, employment or training appropriate to their abilities/wishes/needs? c. Are physically healthy? d. Have good emotional health, well-being and resilience e. Feel well supported? f. Are ready for independent living? g. Are resilient to unsafe behaviours (e.g. substance misuse; missing episodes; violence; CJS involvement; and unplanned early parenthood)? h. Report good social connections, greater social integration? 	Not answerable
8	<p>What has been the character of the support package (e.g. provided by the member of staff from their former children's home) and how has this helped the young person to avoid problems with their tenancy or other untoward outcomes?</p>	<p>Findings: Staying close offer and Findings: transition as a journey</p>

Evaluation questions that are specific to the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot include:

Table 2: Research questions (specific to the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot)

Research Questions	Section
<p>To what extent is the opportunity to take a place in the moving on unit utilised by young people, in what contexts, and what is the experience for young people?</p>	<p>Findings: Experiences and expectations; and Findings: Transition as a journey</p>
<p>How has the staff support service developed and what has been the experiences of young people, staff and other stakeholders?</p>	<p>Findings: The staying Close offer and Findings: Expectations and experiences.</p>

Evaluation methods

The evaluation design examines the implementation of the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot and the experiences of young people accessing Staying Close services. The evaluation took place over three points: scoping, mid-point, and final phase. A range of data collection and analysis methods were used during this evaluation:

- scoping interviews with project leads;
- theory of change workshop, during the scoping phase, with key participants;
- a young person's co-production workshop with seven participants (five currently in receipt of Staying Close and two preparing to transition from the children's home);
- interviews with project stakeholders (six at mid-point and four in the final phase);
- online stakeholder survey conducted at two points (seven responses at midpoint and three at end-point);
- responses to the young people's online survey conducted at two points (zero at midpoint and two at end-point);
- some monthly meeting notes and internal reports coded for thematic analysis;
- four peer-led interviews completed and four researcher-led interviews with young people;
- qualitative coding of all textual materials (interview transcripts, documents and reports, and open-text responses to survey questions), and thematic analysis; and
- two workshops held, with staff from Staying Close and the wider leaving care system, and with young people accessing Staying Close, to validate findings and feed into the conclusions, recommendations, and key messages presented in this report.

Changes to evaluation methods

The initial design of the evaluation aimed to include the following;

- collection of cost data, and completion of break-even analysis (a form of cost-benefit analysis);
- acquisition, cleaning, and analysis of two performance and outcome datasets and completion of distance travelled analysis;
- structured literature review to support the contribution analysis; and
- contribution analysis (Mayne, 2011) to assess whether it is plausible that the North Tyneside Close pilot made a contribution to the outcomes achieved.

Because of the small numbers of young people leaving residential care and being eligible for Staying Close in North Tyneside, the evaluation team and Department for Education agreed not to obtain information from North Tyneside to allow for distance travelled analysis, contribution analysis or for cost-benefit analysis.

As such, the evaluation focuses almost entirely on qualitative data from interviews and surveys offering a thematic analysis of the perspectives of young people and wider stakeholders.

Limitations of the evaluation

There are very small numbers of young people who leave children's residential homes in any local authority in any given year. The small numbers means that some evaluation methods were not feasible. So, while the aim of the national evaluation of the Innovation Programme (of which Staying Close is a part) was to measure the impact of funded projects, it was not possible to use such evaluation methods in relation to the Staying Close pilots. As such, the evaluation cannot comment on whether or not Staying Close works.

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary, and it has not been possible to ensure that everyone receiving or working on Staying Close was involved in the research. The evaluation was funded to involve a small sample of those individuals working on or receiving Staying Close. This means that interview, workshop, and survey evidence presented here represents the views of a handful of people. The evaluation was designed in part to address this, so that a number of different data sources were used at various points in the evaluation. However, the small numbers involved and the voluntary nature of their involvement means that the findings here might amplify positive or negative aspects of the pilot.

The evaluation was funded through to March 2020, to coincide with the pilot funding. At the end of 2019, the evaluation team was advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had extended funding for the Staying Close pilots through to March 2021. This means that the pilot will be running for a year longer than the evaluation. This limits the extent to which the evaluation can consider issues around sustainability, and also consider the longer term effects of Staying Close.

4. Implementation evaluation

Methods summary

The implementation (process) evaluation was conducted over three points in time during the lifetime of the pilot, in May and June 2018, in February 2019 and October and November 2019. Data were collected in a number of different formats (interviews, workshops, surveys, collation of secondary materials), involving young people, accessing Staying Close services in North Tyneside, and professionals involved in delivering Staying Close and wider leaving care services in the borough. All data were coded in the nVivo qualitative analysis software, and thematically analysed. Both the coding framework and the thematic analysis were common to the five evaluations completed by the evaluation team at Manchester Metropolitan University, for both the interim and final evaluation reports.

Findings

The findings are arranged into seven themes that emerged from a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Here, findings are reported under each of these themes. Following this, we provide some reflections on the theory of change in light of the findings of this report. We offer some insight on whether, based on existing evidence of similar interventions, Staying Close might achieve its aims.

The Staying Close Offer

North Tyneside Staying Close aims to provide a series of stepping-stones for young people leaving care. Over the course of the pilot, the North Tyneside programme has developed to offer a range of options that can respond to the needs and different circumstances of the young people. Currently, the provision includes Elm House, a six-bedroom, fully staffed house owned by children's services, a two bedroom local authority flat (with options to engage several other local authority flats for Staying Close), and a range of 'floating' or 'outreach' services. These floating services are developed with young people on leaving supported accommodation allowing them to develop an action plan for maintaining contact.

Elm House is based next to Sycamore House and near Riverdale House, the two children's homes in which the young people have previously spent time. Elm House offers a supportive network for the young people before they embark upon lives beyond local authority provision. North Tyneside Council has worked to integrate the offer into its overall leaving care pathway, which has allowed for the close working of all projects.

The following quotes offer two perspectives on the purpose of the Staying Close offer. The first from a stakeholder in the local authority articulates the aims of the offer in terms of how it links to other aspects of the care system in the area. The second quote demonstrates how the young person understood the distinction between the children's home and the expectations in Elm House. These quotes demonstrate that there is a clear understanding, from young people and the wider authority, that the Staying Close offer fits within a wider care offer;

“...trying to make sure that we meet their needs within our local authority area and that we provide the highest quality of care that we can for those children and young people ... it creates a flow through the system so that we can make sure that we can meet needs of those maybe that are entering care the first time, because we have got that ‘move on’ provision for other young people, who have been in our longer-term care but still maintain a level of need that we need to help them work through.” (*Staff 7, interview*)

“The difference between this place and care is a huge difference. In children's care it was just living ... You get pocket money, you go out with your friends and that is about it, you just live there. Whereas here you get support with things that school doesn't teach you like paying tax and they will get you stuff like a gym membership or they will pay for your driving licence – they will give you a load of support around that. And it's just totally different, now I am looking for a job and they are helping me with that, so that is probably the difference for me to be honest.” (*Young Person 10, researcher interview*)

There is a clear vision for the offer to be part of the flow through the care system from the local authority in a way that “meets the needs” of the young people with whom they work. As the young person articulates here, the offer goes beyond simply offering housing and instead offers a structure that supports transition.

The Staying Close offer in North Tyneside has developed significantly over the past 18 months. At the centre of the offer is the accommodation known as Elm House. This house sits at the bottom of the driveway, near the children's home, and offers a type of ‘halfway’ accommodation for the young people in their care. In addition to this accommodation, the Staying Close offer includes support for those living outside of local authority accommodation, with family members or other known individuals (referred to as ‘floating’ services).

The support offered aims to assist young people in moving to more independent living with outreach support available. This support is offered both for those in Elm House and

those elsewhere and has progressed significantly during the pilot with staff now providing more flexible support for the young people. However, staff and local authority stakeholders articulate Elm House as the key aspect of the offer that has specifically become available as a result of the Staying Close pilot;

“Supported accommodation through Starting Point pre-existed, but Elm House, which has bridged between our residential services and Starting Point, is a new provision which ... provide(s) that additional level of support to allow them to take a step towards more adult supported accommodation and provision.” (*Staff 7, interview*)

In addition to the fixed accommodation that a dedicated space such as Elm House provides, the offer also encompasses a range of support for young people’s journey. The young people interviewed articulated that they received support for everyday aspects of their lives during their stay at Elm House. This included support for applying for a job, getting gym membership, paying council tax, obtaining a driving license, and how to cook;

“I don't know if you have seen it but there is a board in the hallway – I don't know if it's still in the same spot – and they have stuff with what they can help you with on it - like paying tax and stuff like that.” (*Young person 10, peer interview*)

Furthermore, the nature of the support seems to be personalised to individual needs as the following demonstrates;

“They have been helping me with jobs and stuff and I have told them I want to get a nightshift job or a late shift because I just stay up all night – I can't help it. So, they help me with that.” (*Young person 10, peer interview*)

This was not always the case and there is clear evidence that staff within Elm House have developed their practices with young people in response to feedback. This includes reducing the staff who work with the young people, which perhaps suggest a move towards greater independence among the young people. In particular, in around April 2019, there was a clear shift in the staff model employed at Elm House;

“When they first opened they had a full staff team working here. They would have a house leader and a couple of other members of support staff who would be sleeping and they'd be here all day as well. So there was quite a lot of staff looking after the young people. That's changed now. We only have one person. So that's

automatically made the young people themselves a bit more self-sufficient.” (*Staff 12, interview*)

This change was intended to encourage more independence among the young people and was a recognition from staff that young people in Elm House had a status that was distinct from those in the children’s home. There was a particular challenge in North Tyneside that the Staying Close accommodation offer was in such close proximity to the main house. As a result, there is some evidence of difficulties in developing the offer to effectively encourage independence (due to the lack of clarity of the distinction between the two offers). However, the offer has been adapted and developed and the overall feeling from young people interviewed as part of this evaluation is that the Staying Close offer has been positive for their experience.

Innovation

Staying Close allowed North Tyneside to include Elm House as part of its transition offer to young people in the care system. The staff who were interviewed were clear in stating the Elm House provided a type of support for the young people that previously did not exist in the local authority and that it fitted with their plans for developing means of transitioning young people from care to living independently within a supportive network. The aim for North Tyneside was to have this entirely co-produced with the young people. However, as this staff member explains, their offer was led by an opportunity to take on a building with six accommodation spaces;

“We were already well down the road in terms of Staying Close before this opportunity came in the last four months so we were looking at doing Staying Close anyway. And that model rightly or wrongly was dictated through kind of available properties. So, if you were designing it from scratch theoretically, you would sit down and coproduce it with young people and it would follow its own path. The way that we approach it in North Tyneside is us being really, really honest and open, which we’ve always been, we had opportunity to get a building to convert a building, turn it into a six-bed accommodation unit. And it was in really, really close proximity to our children’s homes. And that dictated our model.” (*Staff 6, interview*)

Interviews with staff and stakeholders involved with Staying Close from the outset are clear that the model ‘fit’ with their work and the plans that they were already making. However, it afforded them the opportunity to have fixed accommodation, in close proximity to the children’s home and build support within that unit.

With regards to co-production, although the accommodation opportunity led the Staying Close offer, the support within the accommodation has developed and adapted in

response to the needs of the young people. Examples of this include holding regular young people's meetings in Elm House. As one young person explained;

“Yeah, they do have meetings here – it's what is called a young people's meeting – and you bring up what you want to change, and the staff bring up what has been changed and what could change. And you just speak what is on your mind and they forward it to management, then they will review it and there is a higher possibility it will get changed.” (*Young person 10, peer interview*)

All of the young people who were interviewed felt involved in decision-making and there is evidence that the offer within the accommodation developed in direct response to it, as illustrated by the quote above.

In summary, the innovation of the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside was the addition of Elm House to their transition support. North Tyneside already had a range of programmes in place to keep young people close and to support them into independence. However, the addition of specific accommodation seems to have provided a more complete co-produced offer that serves as a key link between the children's home and independent living that was not there before.

Expectations and experiences

In the first half of the evaluation, there was evidence of some difficulties around staff managing the expectations and experiences of the young people. This was in part due to the proximity of the Elm House accommodation but as staff articulated in the staff feedback workshop, also due to the complexity of providing support but not care. In interviews, staff articulated that young people can think that Staying Close is an extension of the children's home when it is actually intended to assist in the transition towards independence. During the pilot, the model of support used within Elm House has developed in response to these concerns. However, it was also noted in the validation workshops whilst Staying Close workers are able to provide a sense of consistency and continuity to young people leaving care, workers are not always formally trained to support the specific emotional, psychological, social, or practical needs that can characterise and define the leaving care experience.

The young people interviewed had a positive view of their experience of living in Elm House. The different types of support required were met by staff taking a flexible approach to how they supported them.

Meeting notes from Elm House offer some insight into the changes. Early meeting notes tend to focus on rules of the house with discussion with the young people focussing on internet access, use of the kitchen and tidying the bedroom. More recent house reports indicate some discussion of larger goals that Staying Close aims to address (such as finding employment, engaging in education, developing independent living skills). However, there is still a distinct focus on day-to-day living with young people's interviews highlighting their need for support in living independently. Young people did articulate that Staying Close supported them in this way. As one young person explained;

“When you leave from here [Elm House] – because obviously I lived here for quite a while – they stay in touch with you and still support you when you are in your own place or elsewhere. It just means if you need any help they will come and help you out.” (*Young person, 11 peer interview*)

During validation workshops, young people did express concerns about the limitations of the support at Elm House and the changes in staffing over the course of the two years (both with regards to the staffing structure and different staff). However, there was an indication that staff were aware of difficulties and they were taking proactive steps to develop appropriate support and manage the expectations of the young people. It is important that in making these changes the young people were given the chance to express their needs, and, where possible, to co-produce any solutions.

Alongside offering support and accommodation, the programme places a range of expectations on the young people. Staff explained that young people are “expected to be in work or education, whatever, through the day and if they're not, they will be able to do one to one sessions with the staff here” (staff interview). To support these expectations, staff have put in place a structured day within the home to encourage young people to eat breakfast together and socialise in the evenings.

Overall, the research suggests that staff are working with young people to improve the offer to fit their needs. The young people interviewed generally had a positive view of their experience in Elm House and, on the whole thought it provided support that fitted with their personal circumstances.

Implementation successes and challenges

There is clear evidence that North Tyneside has and continues to develop their offer through experience. The data provided by North Tyneside show that there has been a good occupancy rate in Elm House with at least three of the six rooms being occupied between January 2018 and January 2020.

A key challenge for staff was the proximity of Elm House to the original children's home. Elm House is located at the end of the drive from Sycamore House (one of the children's homes). Interviewees suggested that this did offer some benefits including enabling staff to work in both homes without difficulty and young people maintaining a familiarity with the area. However, it has also posed problems in distinguishing between the offers. Staff interviewed discussed the need for a 'change in culture' in terms of the way they worked with the young people at Elm House. Again, the research indicates that North Tyneside have been successful in developing their offer to be more suitable in encouraging living independently and developing a supportive network. The staff have responded to young people's needs and developed their offer over time. In particular, they have developed their formal engagements with young people from one-to-ones to weekly engagement sessions. As this staff member articulates, by responding to young people needs they have developed a way of engaging young people on their own terms;

“...we've done it in a less formal way where we just have conversations with young people when they come down. That's worked a bit better. We help do their plans with them and help them find jobs and things like that...we're going to put that in place where the young people have to make appointments with us, appointment times so that we can talk to them about their plans and help them with support, whatever they need support with. So the day will become quite structured again.” (*Staff 12, interview*).

There were some clear behavioural problems with some of the young people and the culture change from a children's home to Elm House intended in the Staying Close offer caused problems in this respect. However, the research suggests that these issues are being proactively managed. As the above quote demonstrates, the staff have developed more nuanced ways of working with the young people and are developing their strategies of engaging with them in order to manage their behaviours.

With regards to the sustainability of the model, staff articulated that this had been successful. However, there had been significant challenges to ensure that the programme could be sustained in the long run;

“So in terms of sustainability, it has been fantastic for us to test out the model, to learn from the model and as I say, to build on our strategy of keeping young people close. So in terms of sustainability, it's very challenging.” (*Staff 7, interview*)

There is some clear evidence that they were successful in keeping individuals close who may have otherwise ended up on the streets as the evidence presented here demonstrates.

Transition as a journey

Professionals interviewed had a clear understanding of the need to offer nuanced and flexible support for young people transitioning from care to independent living. The programmes (Rent Ready, Money Management) available within Elm House offer a base for young people to develop life skills but the staff also provided support for their individual needs and interests. The staff have developed a new life skills programme based around branching out that will begin with young people before they leave children's homes. This will begin in the next few months.

Explaining why the Staying Close offer was crucial to the enablement of independence, each professional stressed the practical and psychological role of support in empowering young people leaving care to cope both 'physically and emotionally' during transition. They each acknowledged the multiple dimensions of transition in recognition of the need for greater flexibility and sufficient time for individual young people to adjust to their new situation;

"We've been designing what was originally called an independent living skills programme to start working with young people in the children's homes to get them to the point where they're ready to come here. So we're working on projects like that as well." (*Staff 12, interview*)

This revised focus on flexible support, dependent on need, was provided through relationships that are built upon genuine concern, availability and consistency, emphasise a gradual and supported move towards autonomy. On exchange between an MMU interviewer and young person involved a young person clearly stating that they would not want to go straight into their own house because they needed support. The exchange demonstrates the importance of the Staying Close offer as a step towards independence with the young person, after being asked what they thought would have happened without Staying Close saying;

"Downhill, probably, because I didn't have any of those skills before I moved here, I didn't even know how to cook. I didn't know how to turn on an oven or anything, whereas now I do, so..." (*Young person 10, interview*)

As this exchange demonstrates, Elm House has provided an important step in the transition journey. Furthermore, the young people seem to recognise the importance of the support provided in Elm House. However, some individuals within the house questioned the level of support currently provided. In particular, in feedback discussions, some young people suggested that they were not given sufficient assistance with day-to-day living such as cooking and grocery shopping. This seems to reflect the complex

tension between offering care and providing assisted living. Having discussed these issues with staff, they seemed aware of the need to ensure their offer is supported living as opposed to care but not to withdraw activities and support so much that the young people feel neglected. The research here suggests that the pilot programme has offered opportunities for staff to develop and learn from their offer as they have gone along. Finally, this issue also seems to relate to staffing. In particular, the number of staff appropriate in, for example, Elm House is under discussion and the team are now recruiting. In addition, there is reason to suggest that the Staying Close offer ought to recognise the importance of specialised and trained staff to assist with the transition period.

Relationships between professionals/agencies

The approach to the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside enables young adults, who often experience a great deal of distress, to work with a named Staying Close worker who can help create a sense of stability. Whilst personal advisors, social workers, and housing officers have a particular function to provide advice, assess, implement and review the pathway plan, they can also be a stranger to the young person. As a relatively small local authority, staff interviews suggest that this has allowed North Tyneside to develop good relationships across agencies allowing them to work together to develop a suitable offer;

“So, I think, with Staying Close, the service, has never been realised by itself; it’s always been managed as part of a portfolio of other accommodation-based services and even wider than that. So, when we talk about Staying Close and the local authority, and we’ve got regular meetings with senior managers, children’s services and wider, we get colleagues from strategic housing along to those meetings as well and benefits as well, revenue and benefits come along as well.” (*Staff 6, interview*)

Staff interviewed articulated the North Tyneside approach as being one that aims to look at situations “as a whole” allowing staff to work across different departments. In particular, Staying Close has been considered in the context of wider homelessness issues and crisis support for 16 and 17 year-olds that may or may not have a history of care.

Reflections on the theory of change

The theory of change developed as part of this evaluation can be seen in section 2. Here we offer some reflections on the theory of change by drawing on extant literature and reflecting on the data we have. The theory of change developed for the North Tyneside programme articulates three key outcomes: independent living skills, increased

engagement with EET, increased appropriate social skills, and self-care. The evaluation has sought to gain evidence that the programme offers support for these outcomes. To answer these issues, this section focuses on the literature review conducted as part of the evaluation and uses it to reflect on whether the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside might address these issues. The data is limited and it is not possible, at this stage, to make definitive conclusions around impact but we can begin to offer a view on whether it is plausible or otherwise.

Without access to hard data around who has transitioned in and out of Elm House, it is not possible to assess whether they have successfully developed life skills that support more independent living. However, interview data from staff and young people, as well as survey responses, do indicate that the young people feel that they are gaining skills that will help them when they do live in their accommodation. The literature suggests that if Staying Close can provide young adults with a sense of stability and permanence through the delivery of services that are strengths-based and person-centred, a successful transition to independence will be plausible (Liabo et al., 2017; Devenney, 2017; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018). However, research that reports on specific project work for care leavers highlights the challenge of implementing these type of support services (Sallnäs et al., 2004). Changing priorities and inconsistent professional approaches in leaving care services can contribute to distrustful feelings toward the social care system and the intentions of the residential carers more generally (Gill et al., 2020). The importance of additional and formally accredited training for Staying Close workers highlights the importance of having a gradual transition for independence that starts early in the care planning process (del Valle, 2008). The clear message is that the aim of independence is plausible but further research may be needed to consider how well the Staying Close offer is able to define the role and remit of the Staying Close worker and clearly establish the expectations of the service and of the young person (Takele and Kotecho, 2019).

Evidence drawn from the literature suggests that it is plausible that Staying Close could maintain and improve living skills. Gradual transition, which slowly gives young people more autonomy and responsibility for living independently, can foster these skills in a supportive and safe environment (Rashid, 2004; Quinn et al., 2017). However, Staying Close workers should be mindful that previous vulnerability can increase the challenges associated with transitioning into independent living (Cameron et al., 2018). Premature transition exacerbates mental health and behavioural difficulties and impacts on the ability to deal with everyday tasks (Baidawi et al., 2014).

Staying Close workers can at least enable young people to maintain living skills through understanding how individuals may need varying levels of support and guidance. One such source of knowledge may be through Stein's (2006) resilience framework, which divides young people leaving care into groups based on their level of motivation,

confidence, acceptance of challenges, and coping skills – which affected their response to transitioning into independence. This individualised support plan can allow young people to participate in their goals for learning and maintaining living skills – which can facilitate a sense of autonomy and allow young people to reach milestones when they feel ready (Häggman-Laitila, Saloekkilä, & Karki, 2019; Liabo et al., 2017). Such co-production should be employed in practice and not simply listed in support plans (Carr, 2012).

A longitudinal study has demonstrated that difficult childhood experiences may propel young people into learning these skills earlier than usual, and they may feel prepared and positive about living in their own accommodation (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Therefore, Staying Close workers should facilitate hopefulness and confidence and not assume that young people lack the personal characteristics necessary to deal with maintaining independent living skills (Anghel, 2011). However, Staying Close workers must balance fostering optimism with the realism that independent living may be harder than it seems (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014), and encourage young people to not fear asking for help (Atkinson & Hyde, 2019).

With regards to EET, all the young people interviewed did articulate the support and encouragement they had received to engage in EET. Previous research suggests that programmes such as Staying Close can maintain and improve EET if they are provided with the opportunity to stay longer in care until they have completed courses (del Valle et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2017); this provides a support network and places the instability and uncertainty on hold that may come with transition – and can disrupt achievement in education or training (Munro et al., 2012). EET can facilitate an easier transition into adulthood as this gives young people practical skills and financial independence with which to seek and maintain independence in adulthood (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

Existing evidence (such as Children of the Andes, 2010) suggests that Staying Close workers can facilitate improved EET through supporting attendance and attainment in education, assisting young people to identify and plan future employment or vocational pathways, and find university sponsors. Such “pathway plans” should be explicitly identified and cover long-term future goals (Department for Education, 2010). Yet these have not always been put into practice or individualised to each young person (The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2013). The research presented here suggests that North Tyneside is developing individual support for young people and does support attendance and attainment. Importantly, the evidence suggests that staff were helping them find suitable employment for their personal interests, needs and situations. Furthermore, they were not only supporting them into EET but supporting them with the interim issues that they need to be dealt with beforehand (maintaining a positive daily routine, getting a driving licence etc.).

Improved social skills and self-care are more complex variables to measure. The continuation of relationships through Staying Close could contribute to increased social skills due to the development of trusted relationships. Defences developed in response to trauma or due to the discontinuity of relationships can lead to hiding emotions, mistrust and blocking against relationships (Colbridge et al., 2017; Winkler, 2014; Ferguson, 2018). Trusted relationships can limit avoidant and defensive responses (Ferguson, 2018; Rahamim, 2017).

Trust and the continuity of services and relationships is important for the mental health of young people with care experience (Butterworth et al., 2017). Discontinuity has a detrimental effect on identity resulting in self-destructive behaviour (Ward, 2011) through the development of a fragmented self from being in different environments (Colbridge et al., 2017). An insecure base, lack of trust and experiences of unsafe care means young people can become overly self-reliant which leads to isolation (Colbridge et al., 2017).

Data currently available are unclear as to whether the Staying Close has had an impact in these areas. However, the research has provided some insight into how staff are working with the young people and there is other evidence around assisting young people in developing relationships when they move on into other accommodation. With regards to self-care, meeting notes evidence staff encouraging young people to maintain their living space and work together to cook and eat healthy meals. They seem to approach issues of drug and alcohol use in a non-judgmental manner through conversation and dialogue that allows young people to be open with them about what they are doing. This, in turn, should provide the opportunity to tackle problematic behaviour.

Research suggests that there is a high prevalence of mental health issues in young people leaving care (McAuley et al., 2009; Baidawi et al., 2014; Colbridge et al., 2017). Despite this, emotional stability and wellbeing are often overlooked in favour of other outcomes such as EET (Ferguson, 2018). This is echoed by Sims-Schouten et al. (2017) who suggest that the understanding of mental health and wellbeing is ambiguous which is a problem for evaluating projects. Adverse mental health outcomes include low self-esteem, a fragmented self and self-medication due to trauma (Colbridge et al., 2017; Rahamin, 2017). Stakeholders in the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside discussed some of these issues and demonstrated a willingness to work with young people to tackle them. However, the existing literature suggests that training in mental health is needed for practitioners working with young people who are leaving or have left care (Baidawi et al., 2014; McAuley et al., 2009) along with assessment (Baidawi et al., 2014; McAuley et al., 2009). Staff specifically articulated the need for those working directly with young people to be fully trained, particular to assist with managing behaviour which is potentially related to these issues. As, Akister et al. (2010) suggest, it is as important a safeguarding issue as abuse, finding there was a low rate of referral to Child

and Adolescent Mental Health Services (27%) despite social workers suggesting 80% of those leaving care have mental health issues. However, Everson-Hock et al. (2012) found there was no evidence of improved outcomes when foster carers had training in health and wellbeing in the UK but for longer-term programmes in the US there was some improvement for young children.

Research points to a need for a gradual transition from children's services with an accelerated transition being detrimental to outcomes (Ward, 2011). Good preparation is protective of mental health, where leaving early is a risk factor (Akister et al., 2010). Premature transition exacerbates mental health and behavioural difficulties and impacts on the ability to deal with everyday tasks (Baidawi et al., 2014). A compressed transition can compound feelings of distrust, abandonment, isolation, instability, powerlessness and abandonment, affecting engagement with services (Butterworth et al., 2017). This points to a need for emotional and interpersonal preparation (Ferguson, 2018). The evaluation conducted here suggests that the Staying Close pilot will contribute to the process of gradually transitioning to living more independently and the support surrounding the young people could contribute to improved mental health.

In conclusion, there is clear evidence the North Tyneside Staying Close offer has a commitment to working with young people to develop support that caters to their needs. There have been issues around the location of Elm House being close to the original children's home which has meant there is not sufficient distinction between the two places. However, these issues have been recognised and North Tyneside have demonstrated a willingness to adapt their offer accordingly.

Limitations

The research presented here provides three snapshots, at different points in the implementation of Staying Close in North Tyneside. It draws on a limited number of interviews and surveys. It is cognisant of wider changes in the leaving care landscape in the borough, but is focused specifically on one part of this system.

Conclusions

Staying Close has been successfully implemented in North Tyneside. It is making a significant contribution to the leaving care system, and is valued by young people accessing this type of support. It is clear that the Staying Close offer has developed and changed to reflect local needs and learning. In particular, the development of personalised support structure is significant. The Staying Close team has worked hard to ensure that young people can access suitable accommodation, and the offer includes some innovative and effective features. In particular, young people are given choice, agency and voice through their involvement with Staying Close. The pilot provides

flexible and needs-based support to young people as they transition from residential care to independent adulthood.

6. Voice of young people

Methods summary

A key aim of this evaluation was to give a voice to young people leaving, or preparing to leave, residential care in North Tyneside. Young people were involved in the design of the evaluation, as researchers, as research participants, and by involving young people in the co-production of the conclusions and recommendations arising from this research.

Young people played a key role in the evaluation design through two co-production workshops at the beginning of the process (Wright et al., 2019). The views of young people have been integrated with those of other research participants in the findings of this evaluation, and have been particularly important to the findings on the Staying Close offer and expectations and experience. In this section, we focus on two further aspects of the voice of young people; the role that co-production has played in the pilot, and the outcome of a workshop with young people to discuss and validate the findings of this evaluation, and to co-produce the conclusions and recommendations made here.

Findings

This evaluation has found, based on our analysis of views expressed by young people, staff and wider stakeholders across three points and through different methods, that young people have a voice in the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot, both as individuals and as a group. Individually, they have the opportunity to speak with workers at various points (see above) and, as a collective group, regular house meetings provide opportunity for feedback.

Young people are involved in making key decisions about the support they receive from Staying Close. Although North Tyneside had some issues related to the proximity of Elm House to the children's home, the support package for those in the Staying Close offer has been developed in response to young people's needs. There have consistently been regular meetings with the young people that have allowed them to express their concerns and grievances with staff recording their feedback and how they intend to respond to it. The young people articulated that they received personalised support;

“They support me with my motorcycle licence – they are funding that – and I would like to complete that – right now I am still doing the theory. But that is probably another one along with getting a job that is about it, then I will be ready to move out, I guess.” (*Young person 10, researcher interview*)

This support continued after they left Elm House with one young person stating;

“If you are stuck with anything or need stuff moved from your house – or somewhere else – they will come and help you.” (*Young person 11, peer researcher*)

Furthermore, many of the young people specifically articulated how positive the relationship was with the staff;

“None of the staff have never been as nice as the ones I have here because you have a laugh with them, like they don’t really take things too seriously.” (*Young person 11, peer researcher*)

Several young people involved in this research highlighted their agency as being important to them, both in their choice of Staying Close support worker, and also in getting support from Staying Close in preference to other parts of the leaving care system in the borough.

None of the young people interviewed explicitly discussed being listened to by staff. This is despite staff articulating how the Staying Close offer was co-produced with young people. Despite not explicitly discussing this, there is some indication that staff are developing opportunities for young people to express any issues that they may have through socials such as ‘Friday night bite’ (a communal dinner planned and prepared by one of the young people for the whole house).

Limitations

The number of young people involved in this research was small: seven people participated in the evaluation design co-production workshop, two responses were received to the surveys, and four people were involved in peer research. These small numbers reflect the size of the overall population of young people using Staying Close in North Tyneside and the well-noted challenges of engaging care leavers in research.

Conclusions

Young people, on the whole, articulated support for the scheme. They recognised the need for support in developing life skills to maintain a tenancy, employment and education. There are some concerns around the level of involvement the young people have in developing the offer and some of the young people voiced that they need more help and support. However, these concerns could be alleviated by managing expectations.

7. Summary of key findings on seven practice features and seven outcomes

As reported in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (Sebba et al, 2017), evidence from the first round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to consider the challenges and successes of implementation, and the difference the features make to young people. Five of these features are discussed below in relation to Staying Close in North Tyneside.

Using a strengths-based practice framework. The findings outlined in this evaluation emerge from a culture change that both highlighted the risks and failures experienced by care leavers, and minimised the opportunity to assess and support individual strengths. The young people who took part in this evaluation spoke specifically about how their strengths were being recognised and supported by Staying Close workers who could offer sensitive and responsive support at those times and in those places where it was most needed.

Systemic theoretical models. The key role of the Staying Close worker is to capitalise on a relationship-based approach to enable successful transitions, human development and change. In practice, this means that the challenges that young people in North Tyneside face are now (more) formally rooted within the pathway planning process. This approach to support recognises that not all care leavers can experience a successful transition to autonomy entirely on their own.

Enabling staff to do skilled direct work. The Staying Close offer provides an important extension to the role of the residential care worker. A key lesson from North Tyneside is that beyond enabling skilled staff to work with young people in and beyond the Elm House, the scheme also worked towards finding the right balance between support and independence through reviewing the provision of staff in Elm House.

Multi-disciplinary skill sets working together. For North Tyneside, it is apparent that there is a lot of interagency work involved. The Staying Close worker meets regularly with other professionals, providing a holistic and comprehensive approach to the young person's needs. This seems to have allowed the Staying Close offer in North Tyneside to fit alongside other services effectively.

High intensity and consistency of practitioner. The focus on continuity and consistency between the children's home and the Staying Close offer described in this report enables the programme to capitalise on the theory of relationship-based practice. As shown above, Staying Close workers are able to help fence off the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care, but also provide a supportive network to catch those young people who find themselves at risk of crisis.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation has found that Staying Close in North Tyneside appears to have successfully piloted and developed a range of accommodation offers that are meeting the needs of young people in the area. The Staying Close offer has been developed as a pathway alongside other offers within North Tyneside (include the care leavers pathway and the youth homelessness pathway). The model North Tyneside is offering is, primarily, an accommodation offer. Their ability to procure specific accommodation to allow young people leaving care to access supported living seems to have benefited them. However, the support offer still requires development. There is a complex balance between providing care and providing sufficient provision to ensure the young people feeling supported. The North Tyneside offer facilitates opportunities for the young people who engage with the project to experience a gradual, not instantaneous, journey to independence. As shown by those who took part in the evaluation, it can work to fence off the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care.

1. The content of this evaluation highlights a number of examples of good practice within leaving care services in North Tyneside. This includes;

- having a dedicated transition house
- having a range of other accommodation offers
- engaging young people in developing the offer
- well-managed inter-agency discussion

By combining the data presented here with the evaluations that have been conducted on Staying Close projects elsewhere in England, there is a good opportunity to add to existing evidence-informed approaches and good practice examples in leaving care services more generally.

2. Most of those who work in the Staying Close project in North Tyneside are specifically trained to support young people living in a children's home. They are not formally trained to support the specific emotional, psychological, social, or practical needs of young people leaving care in an equal way. Modifications to current formal training programmes could extend to consider the specific, effective, and integrated approaches to multi-agency working needed to support care leavers and the complex process of legally becoming an adult.

3. The implementation of a formal strategy for collecting outcome data could enable future Staying Close projects to verify the progress experienced by young people, and on the aims that it is trying to achieve. The data collected should relate directly to the outputs and outcomes specified in the Theory of Change. Important monitoring data that projects should try to capture include the number of young people eligible for the Staying Close offer and accessing the different components of the offer (e.g., number of young people living in Staying Close accommodation, number of young people attending social events etc.). Regular monitoring might include the frequency and nature of contacts with their key worker, the young person's status regarding accommodation, employment, and education. Ideally, young people would complete a survey once a year using validated well-being scales such as the ONS4, which measures life satisfaction, sense of worth of activities, happiness and anxiety, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. It is important that the outcome data capture short and medium term outcomes, at least two points over time, to measure progress made by the young people. Outcome data could also include a list of independent living skills (possibly co-produced by young people) and a measure of their level of confidence against each skill. Each project will then need to add measures carefully tailored to their own theory of change. For instance, in the case of Staying Close North Tyneside, it could capture budgeting skills. It is important to be clear on what is collected, how it is collected, how often, whether a measure of incidence or prevalence (i.e. currently homeless or has at some time in the past been homeless), and whether it is observed by you or self-reported.

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

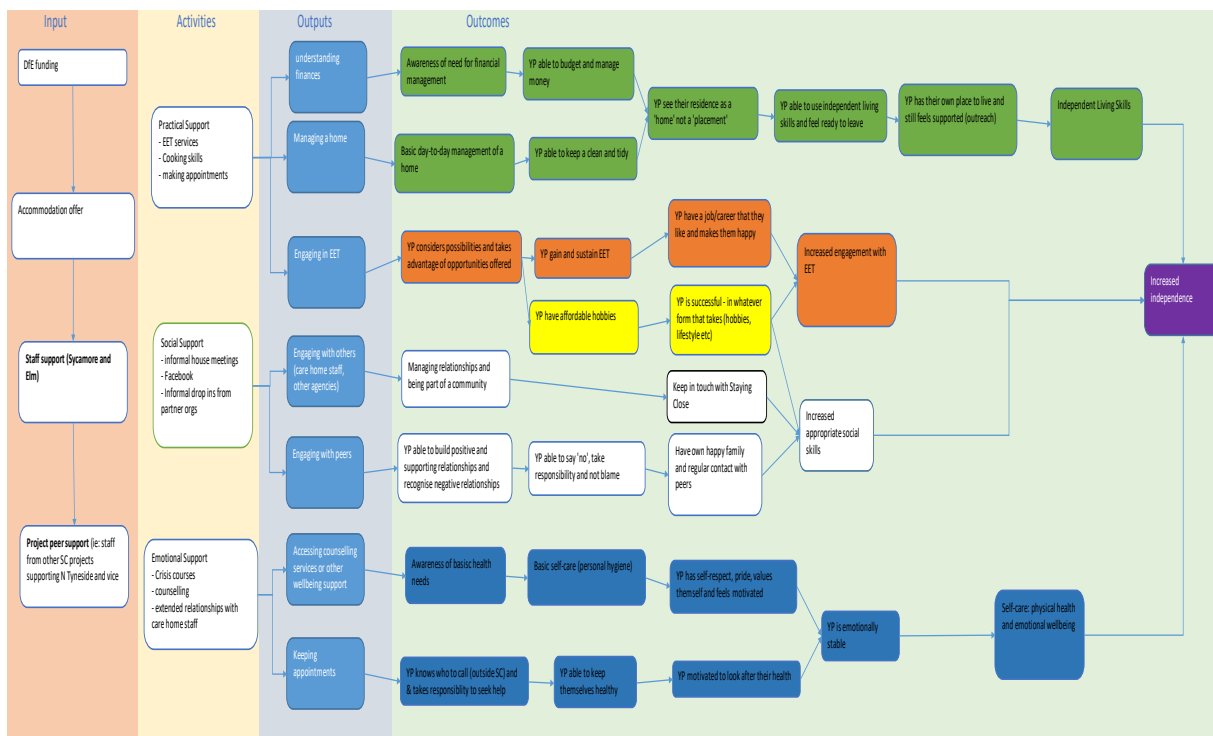


Figure 1: Theory of Change for North Tyneside Staying Close demonstrating the connection between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

As part of the process of bidding for funding under the Department for Education’s Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme), projects were asked to submit a ‘theory of change’; an explanatory model that outlines how or through what, mechanisms and resource use the intended outcomes of the programme would be achieved. The Spring Consortium were appointed by the Department for Education to provide support to the development of theories of change during this bidding process.

Through the early stages of the evaluation, the research team worked with Staying Close pilots (including North Tyneside) to further develop and reflect on their theories of change. Through workshops, follow up discussions, and interviews, individuals involved in the North Tyneside Staying Close pilot articulated and validated the schematic presented in Appendix 1. This process provided a space through which schemes could reflect on the original proposals and make amendments as necessary to account for changes in scheme implementation; to better articulate the causal pathways through which the intended outcomes would be achieved, and help the evaluation team develop a deep understanding the pilot schemes, both individually and comparatively.

There has been a degree of change in thinking about how the intervention is intended to work. This change of thinking can be seen by comparing the theory of change developed as part of the bid process for Staying Close and the one developed as part of the scoping

phase of this evaluation. These differences might be explained by the different purposes for, and process of creating, the two models. The bid theory of change focuses on 'activity-output-outcome' chains, whilst the evaluation theory of changes focuses on causal pathways through which outcomes will be delivered.

The evaluation model suggests that North Tyneside has reflected on and refined the outcomes it sees as being achievable through Staying Close, with the long term aim of supporting young adults leaving residential care to become independent adults.

However, in comparison to other Staying Close pilots being evaluated by the Manchester Metropolitan University team, there is one feature of Staying Close in North Tyneside that has not changed in relation to the accommodation offer. From the outset, the intention behind Staying Close in the borough was the provision of a purpose-refurbished six-bedroom shared house, within close proximity to one of the borough's two children's homes.

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