

National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care



Conference Proceedings

Policy and Practice Meeting Needs: Moving us on to where young people need us to be. Proceedings of the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Childcare Annual Conference, 8 November 2006, Leofric Conference Centre, Coventry

The Annual Conference served both to launch new NCERCC policy and practice documents and to showcase positive developments across the residential child care sector. As in previous conferences it also provided a forum for discussion of the key issues and challenges facing the sector.

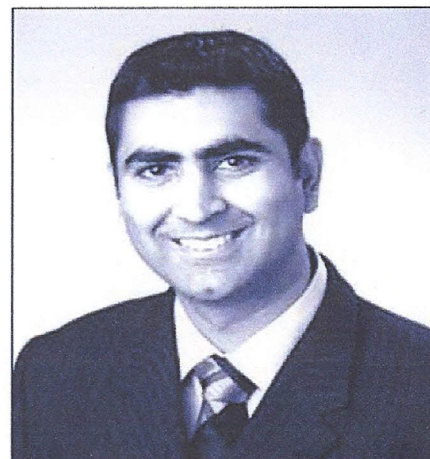
Policy and practice meeting needs: moving us on to where young people need us to be

Keynote address by Parmjit Dhanda, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families

It's great to be here to address the first conference on residential child care since the establishment of the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care last autumn.

The Centre is funded by us, and hosted by the National Children's Bureau. I'd like to thank them for all their hard work over the last year, in particular their work to help the government to improve the quality of care in children's homes and residential special schools.

We recognise that residential care can be a positive placement option – for some children and young people it is their placement of choice and can help them find stability and achieve better outcomes.



I'm pleased to see that people from the Secure Accommodation Network are running a seminar later this afternoon. Secure children's homes are an essential resource and we want to ensure that there will continue to be enough places in these homes to meet demand.

Children and young people living in residential special schools and children's homes should have exactly the same opportunities as all other children. If this is not achieved, then the state will have failed in its corporate parenting role.

By now we've all heard the statistics: children in care are five times less likely to achieve five good GCSEs and nine times more likely to get excluded from school.

A quarter of people in prison today have spent some time in our care system. Over 30 per cent of care leavers are not in education, employment or training at age 19 compared to 13 per cent of all young people; and only 6 per cent of young people who've been in care go to university.

Since 1997 we've invested close to a billion pounds into the Quality Protects initiative. We've taken steps to encourage adoption instead of long-term care. And we've put local authorities under a duty to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people in care. But this has not been enough. The care system can and must do more to tackle the early disadvantages experienced by

children and young people before entering care and help them to overcome them.

Care Matters

Care Matters, the Green Paper we published for consultation on 9 October 2006, sets out what now needs to happen to transform the 'care system'. At present, despite the efforts of many committed people, including residential care staff, their managers and social workers, many children and young people in care are not given the opportunity to achieve the aspirations we have for them. We want their childhood to be secure, healthy and enjoyable. Far too many children and young people experience care as a time of great instability, with frequent placement moves.

Whilst developing our proposals, we talked to children and young people in care; some said they see as many as 30 different social workers. We found that over one-third had been placed outside their local authority area, away from friends and relatives. Others go through as many as 10 different placements in a couple of years.

Our proposals create a presumption that children and young people in care should not move schools in years 10 or 11, unless it is clearly in their best interests. And they make clear our intention to abandon forever any practice that encourages or, worse, forces young people to leave care as early as 16. Instead, we intend to support young people to make a smooth transition into adult life.

The care system must act more like a traditional loving family, with all the responsibilities that implies for corporate parents.

What Care Matters means for residential care

Some of our proposals will, I think, be of particular interest to you: those which seek to improve local authority commissioning and placement practice, and those which seek to improve the quality of residential care. While there is good commissioning and placement practice in individual local authorities, overall this continues to be variable. I'm particularly concerned to hear that some local authorities are moving children and young people on from residential placements where they have settled and are progressing well.

And, overall, the cost of residential care continues to rise, although the number of children and young people placed in the sector remains roughly static. Local authority expenditure on children's homes alone rose by a total of 33 per cent over the four-year period from 2000/01 to 2004/05. It is, of course, essential that the cost of residential care is justifiable, in terms of the quality of services provided and the outcomes achieved by children and young people.

Each local authority must ensure that they have timely access to a range of placement options, including residential care. Children with multiple, complex and challenging needs must have access to the therapeutic and rehabilitative services that are provided by specialist children's homes and residential special schools.

It is, therefore, crucial that local authorities have commissioning strategies based on a thorough analysis of the current and future anticipated needs of their local population of children and young people, strong partnerships with providers, and a multi-agency approach to ensure that health and education services are closely linked to placements. We want to support local authorities who are experiencing difficulties with commissioning: to improve the value for money they secure; to ensure that a choice of suitable placements is offered for each child or young person; and to reduce their dependence on out-of-authority placements.

We're planning to pilot new regional units to undertake commissioning functions on behalf of groups of local authorities. These units will bring together procurement expertise and sector knowledge, and work more effectively with providers in planning local services. They will offer a choice of suitable placements for each child or young person, leaving final decisions about individual placements in the hands of social workers in discussion with children and young people themselves.

Despite some excellent provision, compliance with the National Minimum Standards remains a major concern. Only one-quarter of children's homes meet 90 per cent or more of the Standards. To tackle this, *Care Matters* proposes a tiered national framework of qualifications and competencies for children's homes staff and foster carers, with opportunities to progress towards degree level for qualified staff.

We also intend to look in more detail at what constitutes excellent practice in child placement, including in residential care. We need to know how the best providers are able to make care in children's homes and residential special schools such a positive experience for children and young people. And we plan to reinstate the duty requiring social workers to visit children and young people placed in children's homes at a specified minimum frequency, with a greater frequency of visits for those placed outside their local area.

At a meeting I had with the Magistrates Association earlier this year, I was shocked to hear that children and young people in care are being brought before the courts for incidents that children and young people not in care have resolved in the family home, without the

involvement of the police. To help address this, we will build approaches to management behaviour, such as restorative justice, into the tiered national framework of qualifications and competencies. And we will build into the revised National Minimum Standards, which we aim to introduce in 2008, an expectation that children's homes staff constructively manage children's and young people's behaviour.

As you may already know, we are currently reviewing the existing National Minimum Standards for Children's Services, and underpinning regulations. The review will rationalise, clarify and focus the National Minimum Standards on achieving positive outcomes for children. It will put in place a process that targets inspection where improvement is needed or concerns have been raised – and avoids placing unnecessary burdens on service providers who provide good quality services. Following the introduction of the revised Standards, we propose to introduce a new 'special measures' regime to ensure swift action where standards are not met in children's homes. This will build on the existing enforcement powers of the inspectorate.

Care Matters challenges us to recognise our responsibility for giving children in care an experience that enables them to flourish and grow into fulfilled adults. It sets out what we think needs to be done to make this happen. But it's only the beginning of the debate. My ministerial colleagues and I want to know what everyone, including children and young people, think of the approach we've set out. Will our proposals make a real difference to the lives of children and young people in care – enough to achieve the transformation we want to see? If not, what more should we do?

(The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families then urged delegates to contribute their views through the consultation process, which ran until 15 January 2007 and wished them well with the rest of the Conference. He looked forward to hearing feedback from it.)

Residential child care and secure settings – achieving good outcomes

The workshop was led on behalf of the Secure Accommodation Network (SAN) by Michael Nerini, Service Manager, Clare Lodge, Peterborough, and Jeannette Winson, Team Manager, Clare Lodge, Peterborough



The session examined some myths and facts about secure care, and approaches from the point of view of commissioners and providers that are most likely to achieve good outcomes for young people. Although representative of secure homes nationally, the material presented drew heavily on work undertaken at Clare Lodge, Peterborough.

The discussion highlighted secure care as part of the continuum of residential child care provision. It is not in competition with other types of provision, and nor do other services, despite the marketing claims of some, provide a real alternative. The 'dog eat dog' attitude of some, which is so damaging to residential child care as a whole, has arisen as a consequence of over-provision resulting from government choosing a 'market forces', rather than a strategic, approach to the development of services nationally.

Placing authorities should not regard secure placements as the option of last resort, and should give detailed consideration to which young people require such care, and when a secure place should be used.

Secure placements are only ever going to be helpful for a small minority, need time to achieve results, and are best used not only for containment, but when there is clarity regarding 'fit' with the overall plan for the young person, and the outcomes being sought.

Not all secure homes are the same. Approximately 60 per cent of the estate is contracted to the Youth Justice Board (YJB), some homes exclusively so, some on a mixed YJB/Section 25 (Children Act 1989) basis. Similarly some homes are single sex, while others are mixed gender. Six of the 24 secure facilities in England and Wales are exclusively for 'Welfare' (Children Act 1989, S25) young people. To achieve best results, placing authorities must be aware of these differences, match young people to homes that can deliver what is needed, and support placements involving young people and families in all key decisions.

Secure homes also need to acknowledge that even the best of teams are unlikely to be able to meet the complexity of needs

presented without the existence of a range of cross-agency relationships, working together as a united entity. Systems must be integrated, and planning multi-dimensional with clear processes for identifying key areas for work and distinguishing these from secondary behavioural issues.

The history of 'Clare', a young woman who until recently was placed at Clare Lodge, was presented as an example of how, through providing a wide portfolio of integrated services, good outcomes could be achieved.

Clare had experienced many moves within her family, the extended family, and care placements. She had been physically abused at the hands of her carers, sexually exploited in the community, misused alcohol and drugs, and was excluded from school. Late one evening she was brutally raped. Clare came to the secure home in a highly traumatised state, having made a serious attempt to kill herself. She was violent, destructive, and would prolifically self-harm by cutting the name of her abusers into her flesh.

Through the multi-agency approach available, Clare made steady progress over the nine months of her stay at Clare Lodge. A combination of short-term strategies was adopted to enable her to manage the immediacy of her trauma, while longer-term programmes were put in place. Twelve specialist agencies seamlessly worked with Clare during this difficult period assisting her to make sense of her life and take control of her future.

Clare was reintroduced to school and achieved considerable success. There was greatly reduced incidence of self-harm, a reported reduction by Clare in suicidal feelings. She was also able to internalise strategies for avoiding and managing risk, and greatly improved her self-image and presentation. Clare continues to build on these successes in her present placement in the community, which she helped to choose. One could be forgiven for imagining Clare is an older adolescent – in fact she has just enjoyed her thirteenth birthday.

To gain a copy of the presentation and 'Clare's' story visit www.clarelodge.co.uk Michael Nerini: Michael.Nerini@peterborough.gov.uk