Supporting young people from care to adulthood: policy and practice in European countries

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What I will talk about

- Examples of 'good practice' by 11 members of the International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC)

- Peer research - by care experienced young people to find out about the lives of care leavers in 4 countries

- From these countries, the presentation explores examples from:

- Pathways to adulthood in foster care, residential care and kinship care, and;

- Leaving care law and policy; involving care leavers, and; how policy and practice examples may promote resilience

Pathways to adulthood: patterns of transition

''I moved out at 16, I never felt more lonely in my life''

- Most young people left care by 18 years of age, the age range being between 15 to 21 years (11 countries)

- Their transition to adulthood was more accelerated, compressed, linear - than for young people in the general population

- Coping with major changes in lives at younger age

- At odds with normative and neurobiological developments

- Evidence this contributes to mental health problems, when adding to pre-care maltreatment and further instability in care

- Can be seen as a 'retraumatization' process

Pathways to adulthood: examples of stability and attachment in foster care

''She was always there for me, I could talk about my problems, I was listened to, I was loved''

- *Informal fostering arrangements* - young people settled in foster care, became 'part of the family' and remained until adulthood

- *'Informal'* personal and practical support from their former carers after leaving care, even those who had difficult relationships

- *Legal arrangements* for young people to remain in foster care where they were settled until they reached 21

- Foster parents were supported financially and young people continued to be legally entitled to leaving care services

Pathways to adulthood: continuity and transitions in residential care

- Legal rights for 'Staying put' to 21 or 'Staying close'

- Residential homes for up to eight young people - flexible support by staff who visited or stopped overnight, depending on the needs of the young people and then……

- Residential workers arrange 'follow on' accommodation with young people - if it worked out well, they could become tenants

- Young people leaving care could start 'living in' their accommodation, some evenings a week, before moving in and becoming tenants when they felt prepared and ready

Pathways to adulthood: attachment in kinship care

''I didn't see myself as being 'in care' ''

- In *'kinship care'* young people live with their extended families - grandparents, uncles and aunts, brothers or sisters, family friends

- In this way, kinship carers are seen as giving young people a strong family identity, young people not seeing themselves as 'in care'

- Most young people remain with their kinship carers until they are ready to leave, experiencing a normative transition to adulthood

- Evidence of variable financial and personal support

- In most 'western' European countries - more young people living in foster or, residential care than kinship care

Leaving care law and policy: from 'permissive' laws to 'duties and rights'

''Tackling territorial injustices to reduce inequalities''

- The main trend in the development of legal and policy frameworks in 'western' European countries has been from…..

- *'permissive'* legislation, part of general child welfare, countries *'may do'* but are not required *'to do' , or to implement…..*

- to a strengthening of the law by the introduction of *'legal duties' or 'rights' ('must do')* to provide specialist leaving care services

- Improving the *rights*, opportunities and life chances of care leavers

- A positive development in reducing the inequalities between different areas within countries

Leaving care law and policy: examples, rights to remain and complain

''*When we leave care why should they stop caring*''

- In Germany young people have a *legal right* to 'upbringing and education' until 21, in foster care, residential care, 'assisted living units', If refused, *right to go to court* with a 'provincial advocate'

- In Norway local authorities have a duty to provide aftercare services to young people aged between 18 and 23, if refused - *legal right to complain* to the County Governor

- In Romania and some other post-Communist countries young people have *a right to remain in care* as long as they are in education or training, may be up to 26 years of age

- In Scotland, *right to remain* in foster or residential care to 21 years

Involving care leavers: individual decisions

''Give us a chance to find a voice…Gizza Say''

- UNCRC provides a legal framework for promoting the *rights of young people as 'active citizens'* - 'children's rights' legislation

- In England there is a legal and policy framework for involving young people at different stages of the leaving care process

- In the making of care plans; assessment of needs; the pathway planning process, services to meet needs, up to 25 years of age

- Independent Reviewing Officers – to ensure young people views are heard, also 'advocate to act on their behalf

Involving care leavers: policy and research

''I was interviewing care leavers as a care leaver myself, giving them a voice...it gave me confidence to talk to new people''

- Peer research by care leavers - an opportunity to participate in the research process, in partnership with professional researchers

- Young people can contribute to the different stages of the process

- Interviews; research findings; policy and practice; dissemination

- Training, accreditation in new skills can enhance career

- Children in Care Councils – voice on local policies, their impact on leaving care, leading to 'Pledge' to provide services

Evaluating policy and practice: promoting strengths and resilience

''Care its given me great opportunities, my parents didn't care''

- Having a coherent framework, grounded in evidence, negotiated with staff and young people, important

- Providing stability in young people's lives lays the emotional foundation of resilience through attachment and continuity

- Examples of informal foster care, remaining in foster care to 21; transition from residential care and the use of kinship carers

- Opportunities for gradual normative transitions from care

- Educational success associated with resilience – stable placements, carers and schools working together, 'catch-up'

- Leads to careers, new opportunities, leisure, turning points

Evaluating policy and practice: promoting strengths and resilience

- Involving young people in individual decisions and policies which shape their lives is connected to promoting resilience

- Opportunities to plan an be in control, choice and empowerment

- Peer research - re-frame adversities, including through reciprocity, being able to 'give', not just identified as 'a person in need'

- Young people whose transitions from care are successful are not only able to access more services, more *interactive* relationships

- Able to *negotiate* good quality accommodation, *engage* in education and employment and *participate* in community and leisure activities

Evaluating policy and practice: promoting strengths and resilience

''I've learnt to live out of care….with the help of a back-up team''……….resilience is 'ordinary magic'

- Specialist leaving care teams and services

- Holistic preparation - in practical, emotional and social skills

- Pathway services – education, careers, financial support, accommodation, health, mental health and well-being

- Engaging care leavers with different needs – young parents, BAME, seeking asylum, mental health, disabilities, in trouble, LGBTQ

- Strengths and resilience – to help young people 'bounce back', overcome trauma, to fulfil their 'ordinary magic'

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This presentation is based on:

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This article contains a full list of follow-up references covering the different examples and the resilience framework