CELCIS Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland

In and beyond the care setting: relationships between young people and care workers

A literature review

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Introduction and overview

This review seeks to identify and summarise findings from literature about the nature of relationships that develop between older children and young people, and those caring for them within and beyond residential and fostering settings. We make particular efforts to include studies that gather the views of young people themselves. We consider the issues and challenges that young people face in moving on from care, the type of support they receive during this process, and focus on the relational elements of this support. The study as a whole focuses on young people in adolescence as they approach the point where they will leave care and undertake the transition towards more independent living.

The review will briefly outline the background and policy context, before discussing some of the key themes found in the literature.

- Part 1 explores the issues facing young people leaving care and the need for more targeted, specialist support.
- Part 2 discusses the importance of relationships for young people leaving care and the growing interest in relationship-based practice.
- Part 3 explores various aspects of relationships valued by care leavers.
- Part 4 looks at relationships in different types of care settings.

Review methodology

Given the breadth of the topic, the review needed to follow a broadly inclusive approach. We developed a systematic search strategy for two electronic databases: *Scopus* and *Social Care Online*. These databases were chosen to give a breadth of coverage of peer reviewed material and other sources. In addition to these searches, we identified key grey literature and approached various colleagues asking them to recommend relevant sources. Finally, we hand-searched reference lists to identify additional material not found through other methods.

Although we conducted searches without restricting date periods, we have focussed our efforts mainly on material published since 2000 in order to ensure the review's contemporary relevance. However, where we consider older works to have been highly influential and relevant to the field, we include them.

Example of search term used in Scopus

TITLE(relation* or befriend* or mentor* or buddy* or interperson* or friendship*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(client* or user* or "young pe*" or youth* or adolescent* or "care leaver*" or "care experience*") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(worker* or practitioner* or carer* or professional* or teacher* or tutor* or "pedagog*") AND TITLE ("after care*" or aftercare* or "through care*" or throughcare* or "looked after*" or "looked-after" or "in care*" or "state care*" or "foster care*" or "residential care*" or transition* or "moral adoption" or befriend* or "life coach*") AND SUBJAREA (mult OR medi OR nurs OR vete OR dent OR heal OR mult OR arts OR busi OR deci OR econ OR psyc OR soci)

A total of 145 returns were obtained from the structured searches, including some duplicated sources. We then developed further inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify those works that were most directly relevant to the topic. The following criteria were used:

- Include published and 'grey literature' from peer reviewed and other sources
- Include material related to supportive relationships with adolescent youth in foster or residential care
- Include findings from good quality literature reviews where available
- Include material focused on Scotland, UK and, where relevant, other geographies
- Include material that directly sought care leavers' experiences of the process of leaving care and relational elements of this
- Exclude material not available in English
- Exclude material where it was not possible to distinguish views and issues for care leavers or those preparing to leave care from the views of other participants.

After removing duplicates, we scrutinised the abstracts and/or introductory information of each study to ensure fit with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Full text documents were obtained for all relevant works. A total of 104 reviewed works were included in the next stage, during which we systematically extracted and recorded relevant information from each text; most of these sources included something of value, and were included in the report in some way. The extracted information was then organised and reported thematically in our Findings section.

For context, we also consulted some additional sources, including relevant statistics and government guidance. In total, we reference 119 documents in this literature review. Before discussing the reviewed materials, we provide contextual information about leaving care in Scotland.

Transition from care: background and policy context

Children and young people become looked after for a variety of reasons, including abuse, neglect, and involvement in offending behaviour. They can be placed away from home as a condition of a compulsory supervision order made through the Children's Hearing System, or less often a court. Alternatively, children and young people may be looked after on a voluntary basis as laid out in S25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

In Scotland, children and young people who are cared from away from home will reside in one of several placement types: foster care; kinship care; residential home; residential school or secure care. On 31 July 2016, 15,317 children were looked after in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017). Of that total, 35% were in foster care, 10% in residential care and 26% in kinship care, and a quarter were being looked after at home under supervision. Of the 1,477 in residential care, 39% were in local authority children's units, 26% were in residential schools, and 4% were in secure care, with the remaining 31% in

other types of residential care such as a non-local authority home or specialist provision for children with complex needs (Scottish Government, 2017).

Young people looked after on or after their 16th birthday are eligible to receive aftercare support when moving on from care. As long as they continue to have eligible needs, young people moving on from care can now receive support up to their 26th birthday, as set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The provision of Throughcare and Aftercare support is set out in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and is further defined by the Leaving Care Regulations 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2004). This outlines the role of social work services in making support available to young people moving on from care is defined.

As well as legislation, a succession of reports since the 1990s have emphasised the need for the provision of more coherent and robust support for young people leaving the care system. Calls for these young people to have continuing supportive relationships led to developments such as the *Staying Put Scotland* guidance (Scottish Government, 2013), and the aforementioned extension of aftercare support to the age of 26 in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Research suggests that the single most influential factor in improving outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers is the age at which they transition from care to independence (Broad, 2007; Stein, 2012; Wade, 1997). It is therefore significant that the 2014 Act also sets out new conditions, allowing young people to remain in stable care placements up to the age of 21.

It is also important to understand the concept of 'corporate parenting' in relation to moving on from care. This term describes collective action to improve the life chances of looked after children and care leavers, whereby the state (as a whole and in its constituent parts) seeks to mitigate future disadvantage by replicating the kind of support that non-looked after young people may expect from a parent or parents (Scottish Government, 2008). The Government has recently consolidated this concept, and it is more clearly defined in guidance and statute related to the 2014 Act.

Over time, developments such as those described above have been driving a renewed interest in relationship-based practice. This is exemplified by the prominence of guidance advocating the continuity of supportive relationships, such as *Staying Put Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2013), and the new *Keep on Caring* cross-government strategy in England (Department for Education et al., 2016).

Findings:

Part 1. Leaving care

There have been a number of UK studies over the past 30 years that have focused on young people leaving the care system (Stein, 2004). This research highlights that care leavers are a very diverse group, with a wide range of reasons for entering care and diverse experiences within the care system. Dixon & Stein point out that:

> *Some young people will have positive and valued experiences of being looked after, while for others, it may generate further problems […] they may experience further disruption through placement movement, the erosion of family and community links, and the failure to have their basic developmental, educational and health needs met (2005, p. 10).*

The majority of young people have historically left care at 16 or 17 years old. At this point, the state was widely considered no longer responsible, legally or morally, for providing care. Several studies highlight that this contrasts a growing tendency for most young people in the wider population to remain at home well into their twenties, and for the transition to independent living to be undertaken in stages (see for example, Bynner, Elias, McNight, Pan, & Pierre, 2002).

Characteristically, young care leavers will experience accelerated, compressed transitions (Biehal, Clayden, Stein, & Wade, 1995). The significant life changes that define the transition phase, such as leaving school, seeking employment, finding and adjusting to new accommodation, and becoming financially independent, tend to impact care leavers soon after moving on from their last care placement (Dixon & Stein, 2005). This means that care leavers generally assume a range of adult responsibilities at a much younger age than their peers (Biehal et al., 1995; Dixon & Stein, 2005; Pinkerton & McCrea, 1999).

Furthermore, in contrast to many young people on the journey towards independence, care leavers are often unable to rely on emotional, practical, or financial support from their families (Barnardo's, 2014; Biehal & Wade, 1996; Sinclair, Baker, Wilson, & Gibbs, 2005). Care leavers are also at a high risk of social exclusion, especially through homelessness, loneliness, isolation, unemployment, poverty, and mental ill health (Biehal et al., 1995; Broad, 1998; Stein & Carey, 1986). This evidence indicates that young people are often poorly equipped to cope with the significant challenges of life after the care setting.

As well as all of the practical difficulties that have to be overcome by young people in transition, studies report that insufficient attention is paid to the emotional aspects of moving towards greater independence, contributing to the poor outcomes that this group experience as a matter of course (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014). After leaving care, many young people live alone. Often, this is not their choice, and many struggle with the social implications of doing so (Wade, 2008). Additionally, Marion, Paulsen and Goyette (2017, p. 578) argue that young people moving on from care had few relationships, resulting in a feeling of 'nobody to turn to'. Young care leavers are also more likely to enter into early parenthood or develop extended caretaking responsibilities as a result of ambiguous loss of family (Lee, Cole, & Munson, 2016).

Typically, care leavers face a wide variety of challenges that both pre-date their care experience, and result from it. They may continue to struggle with these issues throughout their lives (Duncalf, 2010, p. 42). The nature of these concerns and poor

outcomes for care leavers is widely documented (for example, Aldgate, 1994; Biehal et al., 1995; Stein & Carey, 1986). However, fewer sources describe how services should respond to these concerns; Wade and Munro point out that:

> *At present, we know much more about the problems and risks faced by young people leaving care (about what does not work well) than we do about the forms of support that may be effective in helping them to negotiate successful transitions into adulthood (2008, p. 219).*

In Scotland, these concerns resulted in guidance requiring the formation and consolidation of Throughcare and Aftercare services and the introduction of Pathway Assessments and Plans as a means of personalising, and quality assuring, the support provided (Scottish Executive, 2004). This support included personal support, help with accommodation and housing, financial assistance, and help with careers and further education (Dixon & Stein, 2005). In an evaluation of four projects in England, Biehal and colleagues found evidence that support in these areas could contribute to better outcomes for care leavers, particularly given the very poor starting points that many experience (Biehal et al., 1995). Similarly, there is evidence from Scottish research that good preparation for leaving care can help young people to cope with the transition (Dixon & Stein, 2005). Ultimately, Coyle and Pinkerton observed that:

> *For too many years the phrase 'after care, an after-thought', summed up the lack of attention given to preparing young people in care for adult life and to the need for development of leaving-care and aftercare services. That stance has changed in the United Kingdom, however, and indeed has shifted positively and dramatically over the last decade (2012, p. 297).*

Part 2. The importance of relationships

Where evidence does exist about how young people manage the transition from care, relationships feature strongly. This should not be a surprise:

> *For the majority of us, the quality of our relationships with other people remains the most important area of experience and the yardstick by which we measure happiness and contentment (Howe, 1995, p. 1).*

Engaging with people through helping relationships has traditionally been a core function of social work and social care (Coady, 2014; Howe, 1995). Building and maintaining relationships with individuals (i.e. having the capacity to relate to others and their problems) is important in achieving successful outcomes. However, this skill is difficult to develop and exercise effectively, particularly when working with very challenging young people and their families (O'Leary, Tsui, & Ruch, 2013; Winter, 2015).

Nonetheless, access to supportive relationships is particularly important for care leavers, as Wade points out:

> *Leaving care is often a time of reappraisal. It is a time when relationships are re-evaluated to gauge the extent to which they can be relied upon in the future. At such a stage, it is important for young people to know, from the pool of people in their lives, who may be willing to provide practical and emotional support as they move forward into the adult world. It can be a time of considerable uncertainty (2008, p. 39).*

The recent Care Inquiry, set up by a group of English charities, drew on evidence from participants with direct experience of care, or of working within the care system, to look at how best to provide stable, permanent homes for vulnerable children who were unable to live with their parents. In highlighting ways that the care system fails too many children, the Inquiry concluded that greater focus should be given to making and maintaining relationships:

> *Relationships are the golden thread in children's lives […] the quality of a child's relationships is the lens through which we should view what we do and plan to do (Care Inquiry, 2013, p. 9).*

The Barnardo's report, *Someone to Care*, presented findings from in-depth interviews with 62 young care leavers. This identified that young people felt they needed someone to care about them, someone to talk to, someone to be with, someone to set standards, and someone to show them the way (Barnardo's, 2014). These descriptions clearly indicate that those young people viewed close and trusted supportive relationships as a critical part of their care that was instrumental in helping them to make the transition.

In exploring the issues of relationships with mentors, young people have highlighted a number of important characteristics that they believe are important for developing these important, supportive relationships. Similar to the findings discussed by Barnardo's, these are described as availability, seeing the young person as positive and trustworthy, offering 'parental gestures', continued transitional support, support above and beyond paid duties, feeling valued, and being there for the long-term (Newton, Harris, Hubbard, & Craig, 2017; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017).

The ascendance of managerialism and the extension of regulatory approaches to services in the 1980's and 90's, led to an increased focus on outcomes and targets in relation to young people in residential care (Coady, 2014; Steckley & Smith, 2011). It is argued by some commentators that in seeking to define, control, and police boundaries between professionals and their clients, managerial approaches have often down-played the importance of nurturing, and developing the close and trusting relationships that young people clearly require (Smith, 2009). For instance, Moore, McArthur, Death, Tilbury, and Roche (2018) suggest that managerialism, in the form of wider organisational and structural factors, impedes on the ability of children and young people to form relationships with staff members that are safe, trustworthy and reliable.

There has been a growing interest in relationship-based practice throughout various strands of social work in recent years. This interest recognises that case management

approaches which focus only on standards, outcomes, and targets, can threaten continuity and fail to realise the benefits of supportive relationships (Coady, 2014; Ruch, 2005; Ruch, Turney, & Ward, 2010). This growing interest, and its impact on policy, has extended to residential and foster care (Scottish Government, 2013). Although, this has not yet resulted in consistent application of such principles to work with care leavers (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014). One reason for this may be that the prevailing practice model for care leavers has been one of 'referring on' from children's services to transition services, rather than promoting a continuity of approach and of relationships (McGhee, Lerpiniere, Welch, Graham, & Harkin, 2014). Nonetheless, the Care Inquiry challenged the assumption that 'old relationships need to be broken in order for new ones to be made', and sought to explore ways of 'ensuring that the benefits of a care option for a particular child will endure beyond childhood' (Care Inquiry, 2013, p. 8).

In making the case for a renewed emphasis on relationship-based practice, many authors recognise that universalised systems of assessment and review can serve to de-emphasise the relational aspects of working with a child in care, leading to situations where children have been denied the close relationships that they need (Holland, 2009a; Steckley & Smith, 2011). However, as previously mentioned, forming and maintaining these relationships can itself be challenging. Studies have highlighted the complexity of building and sustaining meaningful and supportive relationships with children and young people, particularly when there is a high likelihood that they have experienced adverse childhood experiences and significant levels of abuse and neglect (Schofield, Beek, & Ward, 2012).

Other policy drivers may, in some ways, clash with those that promote relationship-based practice. For example, while generally welcoming collaborative approaches promoted by corporate parenting, some commentators have raised concerns that collaboration may de-emphasise relational continuity if this leads to a range of professionals being involved in the life of a young person (Holland, 2009b; Steckley & Smith, 2011). These commentators argue that sometimes no-one takes individual responsibility for following through with specific issues, or indeed offering a closer, more reciprocal relationship to that young person.

Part 3. Themes around relationships

The importance of building networks of social support

Studies have recognised the importance of informal, as well as formal, networks of support, and have pointed to the importance of helping young people to build 'social capital' to reduce dependence on intervention by statutory services (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Newman & Blackburn, 2002). In the findings of the *Someone to Care* report, it was highlighted that leaving care support workers with large caseloads of up to 40 young people, could not support vulnerable care leavers (Barnardo's, 2014). The report suggests that both informal networks and other supporting professionals, such as advocacy workers, tenancy support workers, participation workers, and employment advisors, played a key role in meeting young peoples' needs (Barnardo's, 2014). Wade

(2008) further emphasises the importance of establishing informal networks of support, including members of young peoples' birth families, on-going relationships with substitute caregivers, and new families young people attempted to create soon after leaving care (such as those centred on their relationships with partners and their own birth children).

Many young care leavers report feeling lonely, isolated and vulnerable (Duncalf, 2010; Morgan & Lindsay, 2006) and tend to have smaller support networks than the wider population and those still in care (McMahon & Curtin, 2013). Social workers and leaving care support workers are often poorly informed about young peoples' friendships and social networks (Biehal et al., 1995; Marsh & Peel, 1999), and insufficient time is spent looking at this aspect of leaving care (Courtney et al., 2007). As a result, Scannapieco and colleagues explored a model of practice that focussed on creating a support network for young people based on a thorough assessment of their needs, but emphasised the importance of regularly reviewing and updating this, as care leavers' experiences and needs evolve (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007).

Mentoring programmes have become an increasing feature of the landscape for children on the edge of care, for those in care, and for care leavers. A young person's mentor may fulfil the role of a trusted adult from outside the family, and some studies suggest this can be helpful in building resilience and improving outcomes (Stein, 2007). The role of 'natural mentors' (informal, unpaid supporters) in the lives of older young people in transition from foster care was explored in a study by Greeson and colleagues, who concluded that these relationships had much to offer in alleviating some of the challenges faced by young people (Greeson, Thompson, Evans-Chase, & Ali, 2014). The authors also highlighted the advantages that this informal approach had over formal programmes that can be difficult to establish with older young people.

In their systematic review of mentoring studies, Thompson, Greeson, and Brunsink (2016) argue that natural mentoring relationships may improve outcomes for young people during their transition from care to independent adulthood. Additionally, the Glasgow-based MCR Pathways mentoring scheme, targeting mainly looked after young people of secondary school age, is yielding encouraging results, and has now been extended to more schools following a successful pilot involving six schools (Fassetta, Siebelt, & Mitchell, 2014).

Issues around maintaining relationships and re-connecting with birth families

In contrast to many of their peers, care leavers can often call on little, if any, direct family or support networks within their community (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). However, some studies have shown that the majority of young people are in touch with their families at the point of leaving care (Cleaver, 2000; Courtney et al., 2007; Farmer, Moyers, & Lipscombe, 2001; Wade, 2008). In examining the findings of three Australian studies, Mendes and colleagues highlight that:

> *[…] young people who are able to establish positive relationships with their family in care and/or when transitioning from care are more likely to have a positive self-identity and self-confidence, and overall better outcomes. Conversely, poor or non-existent family links may contribute to low self-esteem and limited confidence (Mendes, Johnson, & Moslehuddin, 2012, p. 357).*

Many care leavers have experienced poor or disrupted family relationships, or have faced neglect, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or rejection (Wade, 2008). As a result, there is no suggestion that informal support provided by the extended family is likely, in itself, to provide sufficient or appropriate support to young people in transition (Coyle & Pinkerton, 2012). Early life trauma can leave care leavers in a position where they find it difficult to form relationships, and to trust adults, particularly where they have had poor relationships with their birth parents (Biehal et al., 1995). In many ways, those young people who are in most need of supportive relationships in their journey to adulthood are often those least able to make and sustain them (Downes, 1992; Stein & Carey, 1986).

Wade's study found that the degree of contact that young people maintain with their families while they are looked after was a good indicator of the level of support that is likely to be available after leaving care. He did, however, find evidence that:

> *[…] problematic relationships could still evolve to the point where they were supportive, even if the young person would not contemplate living with that person (2008, p. 45).*

Other studies (Holland & Crowley, 2013) highlight the importance of helping to develop relationships with siblings and the need for social workers and leaving care services to mediate, working on family issues at the leaving care stage. Although, some studies suggest that professionals do not generally see this as a priority (Biehal et al., 1995). One of the findings of Marsh and Peels' study on the role of extended families in the leaving care process, shows that social workers are not good at identifying these potential supports, or inviting family members into the care planning process (Marsh & Peel, 1999). The leaving care regulations and guidance in England and Wales emphasises that pathway planning should explore all potential sources of support in a young person's kinship network (Department of Health, 2001). Irrespective of whether parents can provide support, 'a young person's wider kin may be able to make a helpful contribution' (Wade, 2008, p. 48). Additionally, care leavers have regularly reported that they wanted to have more contact with their wider family members, and would like to have been better informed about their birth family and the reasons why they became looked after (Coram Voice, 2015; Holland & Crowley, 2013; Wade, 2008).

The importance of preparation, emotional support and interpersonal relationships

Relevant legislation highlights the principle that care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent (Scottish Government, 2008). The Care Inquiry recommended that before and during transitions,

service providers increase their focus on psychological and emotional needs, and building social and relationship networks, as well as proving practical support (Care Inquiry, 2013). However, the literature around leaving care repeatedly draws attention to the insufficient importance attached to this complex aspect of transitions, as compared to more tangible elements such as housing, life skills, and financial support. For example, a 2008 report by the Centre for Social Justice highlights that, in one particular study, '71% of leaving care and personal advisors felt that insufficient attention is paid to emotional support for young care leavers' (Centre for Social Justice, 2008, p. 165). The same report found that a sense of loneliness, isolation, and lack of support was one of the most frequently recurring themes of that consultation. Similarly, in a study by Singer and colleagues, none of the young people surveyed felt that anyone had worked with them to explore or identify gaps in their emotional support network, although they did recognise that some work had been done in introducing them to community supports or a mentor (Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013). In a Swedish study, Höjer and Sjöblom carried out research with 65 young care leavers and found that the young people wanted emotional support when transitioning from care:

> *Not only when they felt lonely and vulnerable; many of them said that they needed someone to talk to about their former and present lives and would have liked contact with social workers and former carers for this purpose (2014, p. 2).*

When planning and delivering emotional support, providers should remember that early attachment experiences and pre-care relationships might affect the young person's ability, or desire, to engage with support (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014; Howe, 1995). It is also important to acknowledge that many young people moving on from care turn down offers of support, and that significant numbers of young people become 'switched off to anything related to the care system at the point of leaving care' (Adley & Jupp Kina, 2014, p. 5). The suggestion here is that it is important to find ways to de-stigmatise aftercare support, and to persist with offers well after the young person has moved from placement.

It is argued that a significant number of young care leavers derive emotional and practical support from co-habiting with a partner and, in some case their partner's families. There are a disproportionate number of care leavers who become parents at an early age, which often happens soon after leaving care (Meltzer, Lader, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2004). In reality, however, stability in co-habiting or new parent relationships can be elusive, and they are often transitory or characterised by violence (Wade, 2008).

The centrality of relationships in building resilience and improving outcomes

The concept of resilience features strongly in the literature around looked after children and care leavers.

> *Resilience can be defined as the quality that enables some young people to find fulfilment in their lives despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, the problems or adversity they may have undergone, or the pressures they may experience […] it is about overcoming the odds, coping and recovery (Stein, 2007, p. 36)*

The resilience of young people from very disadvantaged family backgrounds has been associated with a redeeming, unconditionally supportive, and warm relationship with at least one person, whether that be a parent, other member of family, or parent substitute (Masten, 2009; Rutter, 2000). Having or acquiring resilience helps vulnerable young people and those leaving care to overcome adversity, and obtain better outcomes (Newman & Blackburn, 2002).

Studies suggest that stability, continuity, and secure relationships are key building blocks for resilience, but these are not always available to young people moving on from care, particularly for those whose in-care experiences have been characterised by multiple placements and disruption (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Wade & Munro, 2008). The concept of 'felt security' provides a useful way to understand this (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). Felt security is about young people feeling secure and stable in their care setting; this, in turn, is associated with the development of meaningful and trusting relationships with carers and others who occupy an important place in the child's life (Gilligan, 2008).

Resilience also encompasses the young people's positive sense of identity and personal history, with several authors stressing that those entrusted with care need to help young people to understand why they are in care, and address feelings of rejection and resentment (Biehal et al., 1995; Stein, 2007). In her 2011 paper, Ward acknowledges that young people need a sense of belonging and connectedness if they are to make a successful transition from care. She points out that developing this can be problematic, given that 'care leavers' previous experiences may have made it difficult to establish the secure attachments, sense of stability and sense of self-worth that lie behind perceptions of belonging' (2011, p. 2512). For some young people, a positive journey through care has compensated for earlier adversities, giving them an opportunity to develop their potential in a new 'family' (foster or residential), and accumulate resilience-promoting factors (Newman & Blackburn, 2002; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998). Ultimately, both strong social support networks and committed mentors or people outside of the family have been highlighted as important in encouraging resilience during transition periods (Hiles, Moss, Wright, & Dallos, 2013).

Part 4. Relationships in and beyond the care setting

In her 2010 study, Duncalf cites a care leaver who provides a useful insight:

> *If a young person who lives with parents leaves home, they often do so in the knowledge that they can return or at least visit regularly for parents to sort out problems, whether it's just domestic, financial or emotional. I think this is the main difference for care leavers. When they leave care, whether it's a children's home or foster home, they have no feelings that*

they have a natural right to return. They go from childhood to the adult world very abruptly (female care leaver, 61, Kent) (p. 29).

As previously stated, young people leaving care face accelerated transitions into adulthood (Biehal et al., 1995). These transitions take a number of forms, depending on the setting from which the young person moves on. Additionally, the maintenance of post-care relationships varies between foster care, residential care and social work settings. As a result, these will be discussed in turn.

Foster care

In 2016, 35% of looked after children and young people were living with foster carers. The majority of these young people (25%) lived with local authority foster carers, whereas the remaining 10% lived with foster carers employed with voluntary organisations and purchased by the local authority (Scottish Government, 2017). Portrayals of foster care suggest it offers children and young people the possibility of an alternative 'family' and 'parental' figures, with the potential that these relationships grow and develop to underpin a settled placement, where relationships endure over time and continue beyond the care setting. Central to this is the concept of a compensatory and redeeming relationship (Jackson, 2002; Wade & Munro, 2008).

Studies have shown, however, that achieving stability in foster care is not straightforward. This is especially true when considered within the context of difficult pre-care experiences, disrupted relationships, the impact of multiple placements, and possibly, repeated attempts at rehabilitation with birth parents (Stein, 2004). The elusiveness of a secure, stable foster placement is particularly problematic for young people who are placed during late childhood (Jackson & Thomas, 1999).

The nature of the relationship, and of the matching process, is complex and dependant on a number of factors related to the individual child, the fostering family, and the wider support available (Schofield, Beek, Ward, & Biggart, 2013). The relationships between foster carers and the young person moving on from their care must be considered, not least because the role of foster carer straddles the personal and professional domains identified in social pedagogy, and can also extend into the private domain (Holthoff & Eichsteller, 2009). Where carers manage this balancing act well, they are able to move flexibly between the role of professional carers demonstrating codified skills, and the role of parents that may include elements that are tacit and intuitive, often informed by their own parenting experience (Schofield et al., 2012).

Since the 1980's, there has been a strong focus on seeking stability and permanence for children and young people in state care. Often long-term fostering, as well as adoption, is promoted as a valuable opportunity for permanence (Schofield et al., 2012). The objective of permanence, as stated in care planning guidance and regulation is to achieve 'a stable living situation for a child which meets his or her needs for consistent, sustainable, positive relationships, normally best achieved within a family setting' (Scottish Government, 2007, p. 15). This is to ensure that children have a secure and

stable family to support them throughout and beyond their childhood. In line with this, permanency planning is defined as activities that are 'designed to help children live in families that offer continuity of relationships with nurturing parents or caregivers and the opportunity for life-time relationships' (Maluccio & Fein, 1983, p. 196).

The reality of life for many care leavers does not always match the aspirations of social policy; stable, long-term placements are not easy to achieve. A summary of research in the UK by Sinclair and colleagues found that most foster children experience frequent moves, and that they tend to move on from foster placements before turning 18 (Sinclair et al., 2005). Many young people can feel threatened by the thought of close relationships in foster care, whereby they seek to protect themselves from the pain of repeated breakdowns by not allowing themselves to get too close to people (Downes, 1992; Hiles et al., 2013). Foster carers can struggle to understand this, often seeing the young person as 'difficult' if they find it hard to integrate into family life or reciprocate with close or trusting relationships (Jones & Morris, 2012). Equally, where young people do experience a sense of belonging, identifying with their foster carers, this may not always be reciprocated. The resulting conflict can lead to placement breakdown, and further loss for the young person (Biehal & Wade, 1996).

Where stable, long-term foster care is achieved, the resulting sense of 'normal' family life can be undermined or threatened by systemic or bureaucratic processes such as those intended to assure the quality of placements or improve outcomes. For example, Looked After Children Review processes, and requirements for foster carers to seek permissions from social workers for routine decisions and aspects of care (Schofield et al., 2012). Schofield and colleagues highlighted some of the tensions that could arise between carers and leaving care services, whereby:

> *[…] leaving care social workers, who were introduced just prior to the child's 16th birthday, saw themselves as the key advocates for the young people to help them into 'independence', which often cut across the young people's own view of their long-term place in the foster family, and their foster carers as parents (2012, p. 251).*

Studies examining relational issues between young people and their foster carers have pointed out that many young people value the secure and welcoming environment, and the opportunities of belonging that foster care can bring, particularly where this leads to them feeling like they are part of the family. Young people have indicated a strong desire to be treated the same as other children on placement, and the same as the foster carers' birth children (Clarkson, Dallos, Stedmon, & Hennessy, 2017). They also appreciate when foster carers support their educational progress and have high aspirations for them, including encouragement and help in obtaining employment (Arnau-Sabatés & Gilligan, 2015; Christiansen, Havnen, Havik, & Anderssen, 2013; Coram Voice, 2015; Schofield, Beek, & Sargent, 2000).

Clarkson et al. (2017) highlight the importance of talking and laughter in the formation of close relationships with foster carers. They suggest that where young people and their foster carers spend time in open and honest conversation, or engaging in meaningful moments, they are able to appreciate the significance of their bonds. Furthermore, other studies have highlighted the importance of addressing factors other than the carer-child relationship, looking at the child's relationships in a broader sense to include other members of the foster and birth family, friends, school and the wider community (Gilligan, 2001; Sinclair, Baker, Lee, & Gibbs, 2007).

For young people in fostering settings, placement and relationship stability is most likely to be achieved when placing children at a younger age, with siblings, and with the intention for the placement to be long-term (Christiansen et al., 2013; Sinclair et al., 2007). Sinclair and colleagues found that, although just under half of the young people who answered a questionnaire said that they wanted to go on living with their foster carers beyond the age of 18, only one in ten actually did so (Sinclair et al., 2005). There is widespread agreement in the literature, as there is in current policy initiatives, about the benefits of 'staying-on' in a stable placement where possible, undertaking a planned, gradual transition from foster care (Stein, 2004). Wade (2008), for instance, found that there were clear benefits to young people who stayed-on in placement, particularly around engagement with education, training and employment. Nonetheless, he indicates that this option was rarely provided. In his study, almost half of the young people were in regular contact with their foster carers three months after moving on, however, this dropped to 14% at the ten-month follow-up (Wade, 2008, p. 49). This finding is broadly in line with other studies (Biehal et al., 1995; Biehal & Wade, 1996; Courtney et al., 2007). Wade's study also emphasised that much of the support provided to young people moving on from foster care, 'occurs informally, without recompense or formal integration into the pathway planning process' (Wade, 2008, p. 49).

The suggestion from these and other studies is that there should be more concerted efforts to make full use of the potential that foster carers have to provide placements well beyond the age of 18. Their ability to provide support beyond the care setting and maintain important supportive relationships from long-term foster care should be promoted further. Foster carers should receive help to understand the changing nature of these relationships and information about how they can adapt to the support needs of former fostered youth. Providers need to establish imaginative ways of supporting these on-going relationships. This might include paying a retainer, or converting former foster carers to support carers, giving them more recognition and clarity of purpose (Biehal & Wade, 1996; Care Inquiry, 2013; Christiansen et al., 2013; Scottish Government, 2013; Sinclair et al., 2005).

Residential care

Of the 10% of looked after children who are placed in residential care, the majority are placed in local authority small group homes (39%), or in a residential school setting (26%) (Scottish Government, 2017). There has been a tendency in recent years for local

authorities and independent providers to focus on smaller four- to six-bedded units rather than larger group homes. Similarly, many traditional residential schools have adapted to incorporate smaller living units, feeding into a co-located or central hub where they offer specialist education (Connelly & Milligan, 2012; Smith, 2009). These smaller units seem to provide particular opportunities for forging meaningful and supportive relationships. Studies point to the many positive views expressed by young people, and evidence of positive relationships for young people in residential care. Alongside this, these studies highlight the range of barriers and challenges that exist in developing and maintaining such relationships (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006; Connelly & Milligan, 2012; Fowler, 2015).

A significant body of research also highlights that young people leaving residential care struggle to achieve successful outcomes. These outcomes are often poor in comparison to the general population, and those leaving other forms of care (Dixon & Stein, 2005; Dumaret, Donati, & Crost, 2011). Nevertheless, it is noted that outcomes for those young people who have experienced residential schooling are markedly better (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Some commentators have argued that compared to those in foster care or kinship care settings, the cohort of young people placed in residential settings are more likely to have behavioural problems, socialisation difficulties, and to be in contact with mental health services (Gaskell, 2010; Meltzer et al., 2004). This is likely to indicate that young people who are cared for in residential settings have experienced a higher level of deprivation, trauma, and abuse than other looked after children. These early experiences may make it more difficult to benefit from positive aspects of being looked after. Stein uses the term the 'victims group' to describe 'those young people whose experience in care is unlikely to compensate them for early life adversity and disadvantage' (2006, p. 277).

However, we would stress that residential care will be the best response to some young people's needs, and many young people themselves view it positively. In Duncalf's 2010 study, a higher proportion of respondents reported a mainly positive experience of residential care (38%) than those reporting on foster care (26.7%) (Duncalf, 2010, p. 14). Other studies have also found that some young people clearly express a preference for group care as compared to family-based settings (Hill, 2009).

Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with defining 'family', modern residential child care does not portray itself as a family, allowing a child's birth family to be acknowledged and respected (Smith, 2009). Even so, this form of residential care is intended to be 'family like' in that it can provide children with a secure, nurturing, and stimulating environment where they experience warm, authentic relationships with residential workers (Connelly & Milligan, 2012). Additionally, it is notable that in some of the more positive accounts of young people's residential experiences, descriptions often suggest the care was like a 'kind of family' (Duncalf, 2010; Happer, McCreadie, & Aldgate, 2006).

Residential care can protect children from some of the complexities and dangers of family life, particularly when that family life has been marked by extreme stress, dysfunction or abuse (Bolger & Millar, 2012). As Connelly and Milligan suggest:

> *There are advantages to the group setting where children have the emotional and physical space to develop healing relationships without feeling trapped in a family that is attempting to replace their own (2012, p. 103).*

Relationships in residential care can be enhanced by young people's perception that workers are 'there for them', and caring, nurturing relationships are developed by residential staff living through the 'highs and lows' of young people's lives (Houston, 2010, p. 367). Further, research consistently points to the importance of stability of the placement setting and, associated with this, the importance for young people of positive and stable relationships with professionals involved in their care, particularly relationships with their key-workers (Dumaret et al., 2011; Holt & Kirwan, 2012; Martin & Jackson, 2002; McLeod, 2010).

Nonetheless, studies point to particular challenges in building and sustaining relationships with young people in residential care. One challenge relates to the stigmatisation of residential care and the widespread perception that this form of care is the 'option of last resort', only suitable for those that have struggled to manage at home or in foster care settings (Connelly & Milligan, 2012; Kendrick, Milligan, & Avan, 2005; Smith, 2009). Further issues can be identified in the bureaucratic, managerial aspects of residential care, whereby structural barriers prevent young people and staff members from developing strong, protective relationships (Moore et al., 2018).

Other challenges may relate to the nature of the lifespace itself. Commentators highlight the challenges of developing genuine concern and deep level relationships while maintaining 'appropriate' boundaries between the key-worker and the young person, or providing stability when young people have often experienced multiple placement moves, disruption to education, and a series of fractured relationships (Coyle & Pinkerton, 2012). Similarly, a high incidence of staff absence and staff turnaround can cause difficulties in the formation and maintenance of relationships in residential care (Holt & Kirwan, 2012). Another important factor is that young people in residential settings typically enter care at an older age, compared to children in other settings. This can limit their ability and motivation to form close relationships (Smith, 2009). Despite barriers to forming relationships, most young people report being able to bond with at least one adult who they valued highlight (Moore et al., 2018).

The literature suggests that leaving care at an older age can be beneficial to the life chances of young people (Dixon & Stein, 2005; Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2009). However, this is a particular challenge for residential settings where a strong 'cultural norm' that prescribes independent living at age 16 persists among both staff members and young people. This norm persists despite the

overwhelming evidence of its damaging effects on the life chances of young people (McGhee et al., 2014; Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2009; Scottish Government, 2013; Stein, 2006), and despite the age of young people leaving home in the wider population steadily increasing in recent years (Reid, 2007). There are also the challenges of budgetary pressures, and regulatory issues linked to young adults living alongside younger children (McGhee, 2016).

The intimacy of the 'lifespace' in residential settings may make close relationships inevitable, and reciprocal relationships that arise in close, residential settings can be therapeutic, allowing young people to grow and develop (Ruch, 2005; Smith, 2009; Ward, 2011). The development of close and trusting relationships with young people can be seen as a core professional value for residential care, and social work more broadly (Ruch, 2005; Smith, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge the need to safeguard children from abuse while in residential care settings. This issue has a high profile given the publicity generated by reviews of abuse in residential settings within the UK, such as the Edinburgh Inquiry (Marshall, Jamieson, & Finlayson, 1999) and the Kent report (Kent, 1997). Whilst some have used this as a further justification for managerial control and regulation, others argue that, in addition to a robust regulation and inspection regime, the most important safeguards for children are the culture and relationships within a unit – these should be positive and open, with quality of care and relationships at the centre (Furnivall, 2011; Kendrick, 2013). In terms of good practice:

> *This should also be marked by the willingness of staff to listen carefully to children, to challenge one another and to facilitate young people's access to independent advocacy (Connelly & Milligan, 2012).*

In exploring what young people need from their in-care relationships, a number of studies have found young people value an appropriate relaxation of boundaries within an overall structure. For example, this might include physical contact, sharing personal information, developing special relationships, and offering additional or flexible contact outside of normal working hours (Coady, 2014; Davis & Cree, 2006; Happer et al., 2006; Richmond, 2010). There is also a suggestion that these features can assist young people in developing a sense of belonging and, in many cases, enhancing the feeling that they are indeed part of a 'kind of family' (Kendrick, 2013). They may also help in developing relationships that extend beyond the care setting, particularly in extending the key-worker to young person relationship:

> *Continuity and stability of relationships that have developed in care but have the capacity to endure post care can continue to offer the young person the secure base from which the transition to independence can occur in a safe and supportive manner (Holt & Kirwan, 2012, p. 377).*

It is, therefore, important to recognise that the capacity of the residential unit and the young person to develop, maintain, and sustain meaningful relationships can be critical,

not only to address the effects of earlier problematic attachments, but also as a vital building block in the young person's capacity for independent living (Holt & Kirwan, 2012).

Some writers argue that this capacity is as much about the emotional atmosphere and leadership styles in the unit, as it is about the capacity of individual care staff (Andersson, 2005; Christiansen et al., 2013; Coady, 2014; Holt & Kirwan, 2012). The cultural context is crucial; appropriate boundaries derive more from staff cultures, and the moral stance adopted by individual carers than from particular codes or procedures (Smith, 2009). Some authors have argued that a fundamental rethink of the ethics and practice of residential care is needed in order to reclaim relational practice as a cornerstone of the provision (Steckley & Smith, 2011). A number of authors have pointed to social pedagogy as a framework that lends itself to relationship-based practice, to the use of 'the self' in a caring capacity, and to the therapeutic potential that exists within group care settings (Holthoff & Eichsteller, 2009; Smith, 2009).

Wade and other commentators, particularly young people themselves, have drawn attention to the importance to young care leavers of returning to their previous residential care settings for visits, or to mark special occasions, helping to mitigate social isolation (Broad, 2005; Wade, 2008). In their 2005 study, Dixon and Stein found a third of Scottish local authorities reported having formal policies in relation to providing a continuing role for foster and residential carers beyond the care setting. This included the use of residential units as designated contact points for care leavers, and the use of residential workers to provide continuing outreach work (Dixon & Stein, 2005). A further fifth of local authorities reported that such arrangements could be made on an individual case-to-case basis if it was felt to benefit the young person. Thus, over half of Scottish local authorities recognise Holthoff and Eichsteller's (2009) value of promoting or facilitating on-going relationships with residential carers beyond the time at which a young person leaves the setting.

Studies have pointed out the importance of acknowledging the young person's agency and choice about whether or not to maintain contact, and noted that sometimes relationships may be strained at the point of leaving care (Holt & Kirwan, 2012). A further barrier to continued contact was the subsequent responsibilities and capacity of foster carers and residential workers, as they take on the care of other looked after young people (Dixon & Stein, 2005).

The social work relationship

This review has focussed on the key relationships that develop between young people and their carers within fostering and residential settings, but the literature highlights the important role that other relationships have in supporting young people through the transition from care. For example, research indicates that children and young people value their relationship with their social worker (Larkins et al., 2015). The literature identifies a range of qualities that help young people to form good relationships with their social workers that are also likely to be important in other relationships. Young people

value workers who are reliable, honest, available, interested, and effective listeners; they appreciate workers who take them and their views seriously, accept and respect them, are ambitious for them, and who are committed to them (Care Inquiry, 2013; Coram Voice, 2015; Larkins et al., 2015; McLeod, 2010; Morgan & Lindsay, 2006; Ridley et al., 2016; Winter, 2015). In addition, it is very common for the social worker to be the only link between the family background of the young person and their life in care (Winter, 2015).

The quality of these relationships also depends on the length of time the child or young person has known the social worker (Schofield & Stevenson, 2009). In one study seeking the views of 16 care-experienced young people, almost none had had a continuous positive relationship with an adult from their early or mid-childhood (Holland, Floris, Crowley, & Renold, 2010). In a world of restructuring, frequent moves and changes of social worker, it is increasingly unlikely that a single social worker will stay with a child throughout, and beyond, their care journey (Winter, 2015). This is clearly important for young people in understanding their past and in forging their adult identity. Where strong, trusting, enduring relationships exist between social workers and young people, these can be transformational (Who Cares Trust, 2012).

The literature highlights that the interface between the young person's social worker and any leaving care worker is critical to providing effective support for care leavers. There is a variety of service provision arrangements in Scotland for providing these supports. These include: specialist leaving care teams; the extension of children's social work services to care leavers, where the social worker as the key person in co-ordinating support; contracting out support services to the third sector, and; amalgamating services such as leaving care and youth justice services (McGhee et al., 2014). In some instances, residential care staff retain the key role in supporting young people beyond the care setting. Ultimately, Stein and Dixon's study identified that:

> *Support from social workers and, to some extent, specialist leaving care workers tended to fall away in the early months after leaving care, particularly for young people remaining at home who were previously on a supervision order, or those returning home from a care placement. Where contact had been maintained, help from leaving care workers was generally viewed more positively than help from area social workers, although there was some evidence that young people were confused about who was, or should be, working with them' (Dixon & Stein, 2005, p. 116)*.

Summary and conclusion

Studies from the UK and other comparable countries clearly indicate the range of challenges and potential hazards that young care leavers can encounter on their journey towards adulthood and independence. They also clearly emphasise the value of supportive relationships in helping young people to overcome these challenges. Notably,

they highlight a number of important issues that need further consideration. These issues are discussed below.

Agency and autonomy of care leavers

In building supportive relationships and extending these relationships beyond the care setting, it is important to recognise the agency of the young person. In the testing circumstances of leaving care, young people will want, and need, to assert their autonomy in ways that their circumstances may have prevented in the past. Research involving young people shows their own concerns about what happens when they are not offered effective support, or when they reject or disengage with support, and their indication that mentors in particular should remain contactable for advice at any point in the future (Newton et al., 2017). It is clear that the rationale for recent policy changes in Scotland is to offer care leavers coherent support through their transition to adulthood and to enable this support to continue for longer - this must include consideration of the continuity of relationships. Young people, whose early lives have often been characterised by the need to survive in an uncertain world, may find it hard to make and sustain relationships and to make use of support. Considerable creativity, as well as persistence, will be required on the part of support services to encourage young people's engagement or re-engagement, ensuring that relationships are central to this.

Supportive relationships

We do, however, know much about what works to achieve these continued relationships. There is a clear, consistent message from research that, where supportive relationships are in place, they are central to the process of successful transitions for young care leavers. We should not leave these relationships to chance. The literature identifies the important role of managers and practitioners in facilitating these key relationships, particularly where young people lack family or community-based support networks (Moore et al., 2018). This type of support can be crucial for young care leavers, particularly those that leave care as young as aged 16 or 17. In order to realise this potential, it may be necessary to challenge some of the attitudes and service structures that run counter to the continued provision of support and relationships. Such provision includes leaving care services that take over from previous supports with little overlap or scope for joint working.

Informal networks of support

The literature also highlights the importance of helping young people to build informal networks of support to complement statutory and professional provisions. One strong theme that emerges is the considerable potential in harnessing the power and commitment of existing relationships, and facilitating the extension of these beyond the care setting, as a formal, or semi-formal, aspect of a young person's support plan (Marion et al., 2017). The importance of supporting young people to develop and build resilience does not stop when they leave care, and the need for a committed and supportive adult in their lives is often stronger than ever at this point. This support should help young people to avoid or reduce feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Emotional support

It is easy to overlook the importance of emotional support in favour of practical, task-oriented work in preparing young people to leave care and supporting them through the transition. Studies suggest that supporting agencies should devote more time and resources to exploring the reasons why young people were looked after. They should take time to reflect with them on the implications of leaving care on their relationships with their birth family, and on their interpersonal relationships more generally, particularly where young people have faced adverse childhood experiences (Smith, 2009). The indications are that in approaching this transition more pro-actively, care leaving services may be pre-empting problems, benefitting care leavers by increasing their self-awareness and problem-solving skills. Given that the majority of care leavers are likely to have substantial contact with their family or extended family on leaving care (Wade & Munro, 2008), it would appear to be important for services to acknowledge and help young people to deal with the consequences of this.

Supporting former carers

In highlighting the potential of continuing relationships beyond care, the research notes the need to provide structure and support to former carers if they are to continue assisting young people. The evidence suggests that if these processes are left to chance, contact is unlikely to be maintained, particularly if there was conflict in the latter stages of the placement. There are clearly significant numbers of relationships that are sustained well beyond the ending of the placement, often enduring for as long as they are needed; it seems those young people have benefitted greatly as a result. Where placements end because of conflict, this often goes unresolved, ultimately leading to a situation where restarting contact without support is not a realistic option for young people.

Relationship-based practice

In the case of residential care, there is a growing interest in reclaiming the central importance of relationship-based practice, but considerable barriers need to be tackled before support beyond the care setting becomes core practice (McGhee, 2016). These include training and awareness-raising for staff and young people in residential units, as well as clear, consistent guidance from managers about the importance of relationships in and beyond the care setting. Taking this action could be central in developing a smooth transition for young people moving on from residential care, ensuring positive and supportive relationships with adults involved in their care continue to be maintained and encouraged.

Supportive environment for practitioners

If the 'relationship is the intervention', the uncertainty of practitioners to engage fully in that relationship can only be detrimental to young people (Fewster, 2004). Attachment-informed and relationship-based practice needs to be at the heart of any good service (Care Inquiry, 2013; Furnivall, 2011; McGhee, 2016; Winter, 2015). Creating a model of care underpinned by this approach requires staff to be encouraged and empowered to

develop their practice within a supportive culture (Scottish Government, 2013; Trevithick, 2014). The impact of the *Staying Put Scotland* initiative (Scottish Government, 2013) has the potential to provide an enabling context for these practices and the relational elements of this. The impact of these recent policy and legislative changes may not become fully clear for some time.

Empowering care leaver's

The steady increase in advocacy organisations and care leaver's participation groups suggest there is a growing group of empowered young care leavers who wish to speak out and influence services. As Duncalf concluded in her study:

> *There needs to be recognition that care leavers of all ages have a wealth of knowledge and experience that can benefit current practices and practitioners. In light of this, there needs to be greater involvement of care leavers of all ages in research, policy and practice (2010, p. 42).*

In conducting this review, there is strong evidence to support the Care Inquiry's conclusions that:

> *High-quality relationships matter more than anything else for children in or on the edge of care […] and we need a care system that places at its heart the quality and continuity of relationships, and that promotes and enhances the ability of those who are important to children – care givers and others – to provide the care and support they need (2013, p. 8).*

As a final note, we offer a concluding quote from Carrie Reid's paper reflecting on the situation in Canada:

> *Research shows that youth who maintain relationships with at least one supportive adult are far more likely to go on to have successful outcomes. Thus, a key factor for the success of youth leaving care is the same as what all other youth need: an adult who cares and provides support in good times and bad (2007, p. 36).*

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About CELCIS

CELCIS, based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. Ours is a truly collaborative agenda; we work alongside partners, professionals and systems with responsibility for nurturing our vulnerable children and families. Together we work to understand the issues, build on existing strengths, introduce best possible practice and develop solutions. What's more, to achieve effective, enduring and positive change across the board, we take an innovative, evidence-based improvement approach across complex systems.

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