

‘Someone Who is There For Me’:

Relationships that Work for
Young People in Care

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Keyworker Study



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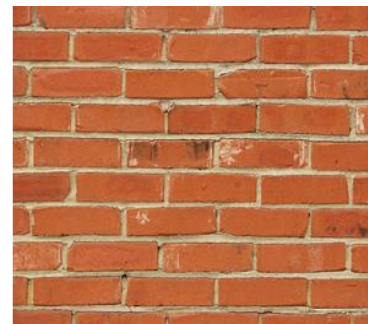
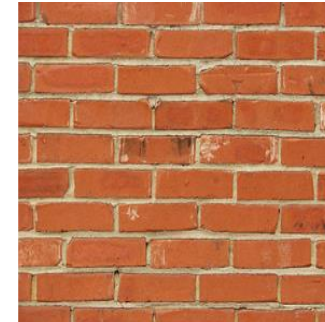
Presentation Themes




Relationships



Work



Needs



'The "Key" to Successful Transitions for Young People Leaving Residential Child Care: The Role of the Keyworker'

In *Child Care in Practice*, 18(4), 371-392, 2012



This study revealed issues beyond keyworking relationships in care contexts



Young People Told Us They Experience:

- Different types of relationships with care staff
- Some relationships provide them with a sense of security
“secure base”
“felt security”
- Some, they perceive - “just come in here to get paid”

Care Workers Told Us They Experience:

- Various types of relationships with young people in care
- Some spoke about creating “nurturing environments”
and
- Adopting a “relationship-based approach”
- Others talked about “appropriate boundaries” and the importance of avoiding “blurring”



The Study Illuminated a Dichotomy in how Care Workers think about the relationships they have with young people in care.

How can we describe or theorize relationships between care staff and young people in care?

Care Leaver quote:

“This is my home, this will always be my home. They are my family life ‘cos they are always here if they say they are going to be”

Care Staff Quotes

Keyworker 1

- We are his family, his memories, the past, his identity, his support, unconditionally, this is his home

Keyworker 2

- To some degree you have to let go, to have energy and space for the other kids coming through, but it is great when they come back and are doing well

Differing Views

Young Person

- Like 'leaving care', what does that mean?I've moved out of here, and I know I am not in care now, but I haven't left here

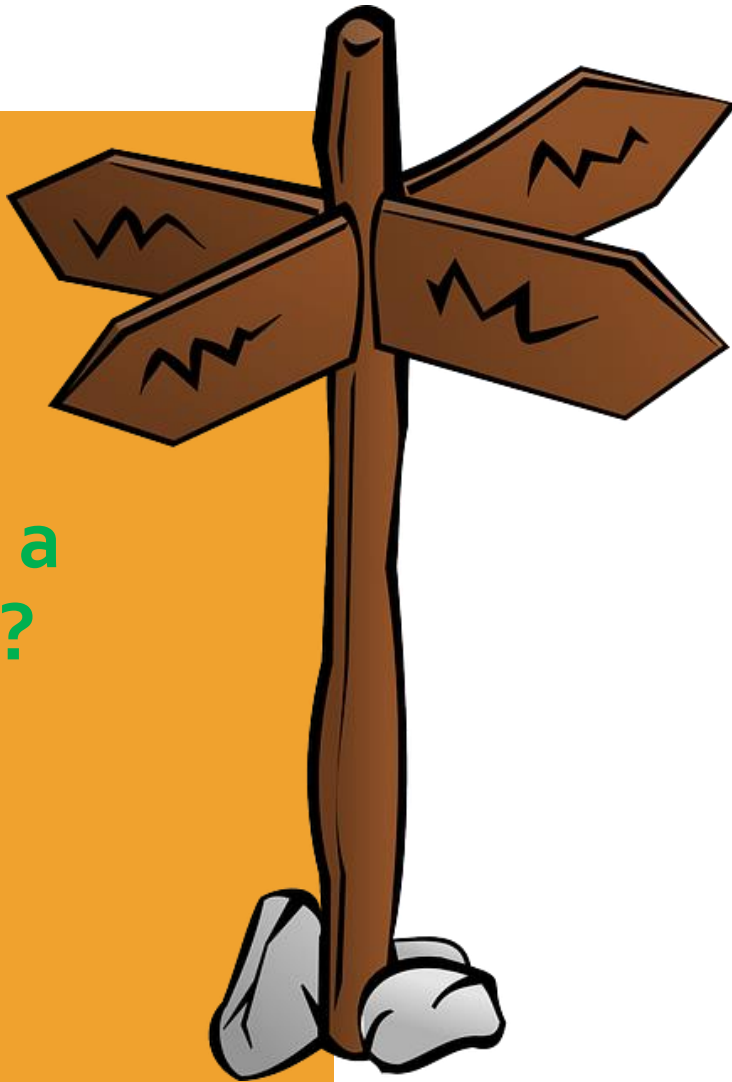
Care Worker

- I have seen keyworking very inappropriately used where people were way too often involved and almost the child, the young person becomes another part of them within the work context

Mixed Messages?

- What is the nature of the relationships we think care workers and young people in care should have with each other?
- What happens to or in relationships when one party is engaging in a relationship in a paid, employment context?
- What are reasonable / unreasonable expectations in the young person-care worker relationship equation?

Needs as a Signpost?



- To be respected
- To be nurtured
- To be accepted
- To be believed in
- To be helped
- To be understood
- To be enjoyed
- To be supported
- To be comforted
- To be loved unconditionally
- To be remembered or To be in contact

Social Work Practice

Psychotherapeutic approaches
in Health, Welfare and
the Community

‘Who do I turn to if something really bad happens?’ Key working and relationship based practice in residential care.

M. Swan, S. Holt & G. Kirwan (2018) *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 32(4), 447-461.

**Constant
+
Positive**

- Kohlstaedt, 2010, p. 49 – referring to supportive relationships in care contexts:

“the patterned, repetitive structure, care, fun and connection as well as confrontation, saying no, and being with the child in pain that allows the child to open himself/herself to a world of trust”

E. Kohlstaedt (2010) What is harmed by relationship can be healed by relationship: A developmental/relational approach to residential treatment for young children. *Scottish Journal for Residential Child Care*, 9(1), 44-53.

Trust

- “If I had to tell him (keyworker) something that was serious or something, he would be there for me but I’ve always told him everything and I’ve always trusted him with everything....”

Support

- “it would just be... you know, someone that’s there who will look after you, that they’re there for when you need them and you can rely on them”

Available – for how long?

- “I think you need one [trusted adult] that stays with you for the whole time, till you’re gone. Even after. Like, I think everyone, I think people especially in care because there are people out there who don’t have anybody. I think that you need to have someone there that you can always go back to....”
- **“Who do I turn to if something bad happens?”**

Implications

- Can care staff and young people in care have relationships that are positive for young people in care?
- Our research suggests this is possible and is happening
- There are implications for how care work is organized and resourced

Resource Implications

- **Care Leaving Age** – do we need a more flexible model? Age-based cut-off points do not fit an individualized model of care.
- **Staff:Young People Ratio** – relationships take time, need to be resourced
- **Aftercare** – relationships still important to the young care leavers. Problematic to view post-care relationships as add-ons, incidental and not resourced.
- **Conceptualisation of Relationships** in the Care Environment – more attention to the benefits that flow from relationships that feel right, that work well, that provide constancy, support, etc



THANK YOU