

Key Findings

Care to College

An Exploratory Study on Care-Experienced Students' Educational Journeys

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Key Findings

Impact of Care Placement and School Changes on Education

Young people's attitude to education is often influenced by changes in care placements and school changes, learning difficulties, insufficient support with schoolwork, not feeling as smart as other students, and mental health issues.



Multiple care placements and school changes are likely to make their school engagement more challenging. Care placement changes may result in students missing school and finding it hard to catch up afterwards.

Multiple moves may have an adverse impact on a young person's ability to adjust to new routines and rules, their educational outcomes, ability to form interpersonal relationships and their wellbeing.



It is important to note that poor school attendance and lower grades do not necessarily reflect lack of interest of a young person in education but are often influenced by circumstances beyond their control.

Key Findings

Friendships and Connections

Making friends was harder for the young people who had experienced several school changes. Interrupted friendships made it more difficult for these young people to form new interpersonal connections.



In some cases, care-experienced young people found it difficult to form close friendships as it was difficult to explain their living arrangements, especially when in residential care.

Support from Social Workers

Social workers were a source of consistent support for some care-experienced young people. However, in other cases, such support was found to be wanting, especially when there had been a change in a social worker or when the interaction between the young person and the social worker was limited.



The research also found that communication between social workers and school personnel may sometimes be insufficient, especially around school moves.

Key Findings

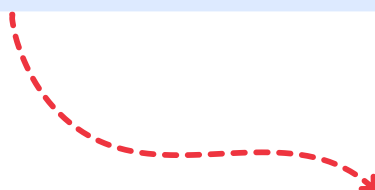
The Role of Teachers and Foster Families



Teachers can have a transformative role in the lives of students. Their support is particularly important for care-experienced young people who often have disrupted lives in terms of care placements and change of schools. Students may find it easier to ask for support if a teacher shows genuine interest in their lives.



Proactive and supportive foster parents play a key role in supporting the education of young people in their care and helping them in developing aspirations for their future. Quality of support from foster families is important as young people with supportive foster families who recognise the importance of education can get a lot of advice and support from them.



Young care-experienced people who had a more stable care placement, with fewer school changes and high expectations from their foster parents and social workers, perceived entry into third-level education after finishing school as something that 'you do'.

Key Findings

Aftercare Support



While support from an aftercare worker was considered important by care-experienced young people as they prepared to leave care, the young people in this study criticised the level of support they received.

Planning for the Future and Leaving Care

Several young people in this study had been undecided about what to do after finishing school.



While all young people had access to a guidance counsellor, for many, guidance about their post-school options was seen as insufficient or their chosen option was not supported by guidance counsellors and social workers.

Negative feedback from teachers and career guidance may demotivate some young people.



Key Findings

Expectations and Pressure Around Higher Education

Young care-experienced people who had a more stable care placement, had experienced fewer school changes and had high expectations from their foster parents and social workers perceived entry into third-level education after finishing school as something that 'you do'.



Some young care-experienced people who did not wish to pursue third-level education or did not want to do it straight after finishing school felt pressurised to do so, given that eligibility for the aftercare allowance is dependent on being on an accredited education course, third level course or training programme.



Challenges in Higher Education

As with other young people, care leavers faced multiple challenges on enrolling to third-level education including getting used to a new educational setting, finding accommodation, and managing their finances.



Directions for Policy Development

School

The findings of the study highlight the importance of acknowledging the impact of the intersection of school experience with care experience for shaping the post-school lives of vulnerable care leavers.



Schools, teachers and social workers need to prioritise the needs of care-experienced children and young people to support their school engagement and ensure they have the best possible opportunity to continue their education after finishing school, as a higher level of educational attainment is associated with better life chances later on.

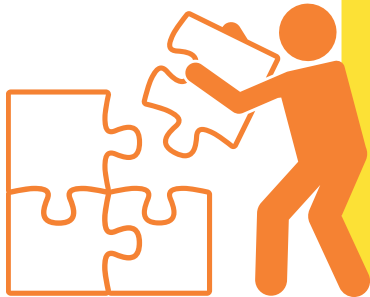


At school level, teachers and other staff members should be sufficiently informed about the challenges associated with being in care, to adequately support care-experienced students.



Directions for Policy Development

Inter-agency Collaboration



Inter-agency collaboration can make it easier for care-experienced children and young people to negotiate different transition points during their educational career. Such collaboration can also make it easier to support young people who experience mental health issues.

Transition from School to Post-School Education and Training

The double transition of leaving care and secondary school can be challenging. Compared to their non-care-experienced peers, young care leavers may find it harder to negotiate the transition from second level to third-level education due to a lack of family support.



Even with aftercare support for those who qualify, some may still struggle in post-school education. Third-level institutions can assist the care-experienced young people by linking them with available supports, and provide targeted support where needed.