



empowering people in care



Summary of EPIC Research Findings on Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care in North Dublin

Aims of the research

This research study focused on young people's outcomes at the critical time of preparing to or having recently left care. There were two rounds of data collection on outcomes, conducted nine months apart.¹ The study included 65 young people aged 17-18 years old at Round 1 (R1) who had been in care in the North Dublin area. The primary aim of the research was to examine to what extent young people's needs changed over time and to identify factors associated with more positive outcomes.

In 2006, a policy was developed on the provision of aftercare services in the Health Service Executive (HSE) areas of North West Dublin, North Central Dublin and North Dublin.² Aftercare Workers are employed in each of these areas. This research explored young people's progress considering the aftercare supports that were available in their area.

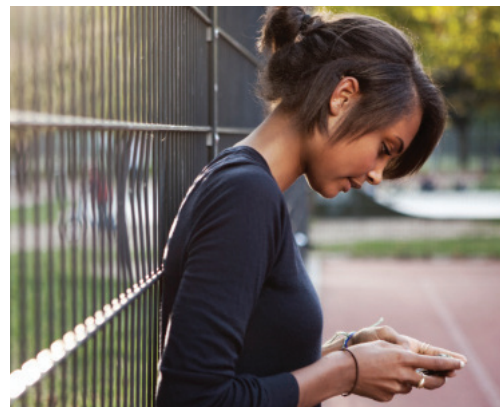
How was the study carried out?

The study involved three forms of data collection:

- (1) Surveys completed with Aftercare Workers about the circumstances of 65 young people;³
- (2) Interviews with eight young people (who were also included in the surveys above);
- (3) Interviews with eight Aftercare Workers from the North Dublin area.

The surveys compiled quantitative data on many aspects of young people's circumstances, e.g. accommodation, education, health, as well as their care placement history. This information was collected in May/June 2010 (Round 1) and again in December 2010/January 2011 (Round 2). The survey data were analysed using the statistical computer package SPSS.

Interviews were carried out with young people to explore their experiences of leaving care and of the aftercare supports they received. Similarly, the interviews with Aftercare Workers provided an insight into some of the issues around aftercare from a practitioner's point of view. The findings documented in this summary focus primarily on the survey data findings, although some quotes from the interviews with young people are also presented. A final report on all of the research findings will be available in the coming months.



¹The two rounds of data collection will be referred to as R1 and R2.

²See Health Service Executive (2006) *Model for the Delivery of Leaving Care and Aftercare Services in HSE North West Dublin, North Central Dublin and North Dublin*

³This involved Aftercare Workers in the HSE and 2 voluntary organisations in North Dublin.



Profile of Young People in the Study

R1 = Round 1

R2 = Round 2

Gender: 49% (32) of young people were male and 51% (33) were female.

Age: At R1, 80% (52) of young people were 18 years old and the remaining 20% (13) were aged 17. At R2, 45% (29) were aged 18 and 52% (34) were 19 years old.

Country of birth: 94% (61) of young people were born in Ireland.

Child dependants: At R1, 14% (9) of young people had a child or were currently expecting the birth of a child. This rose to 17% (11) at R2.

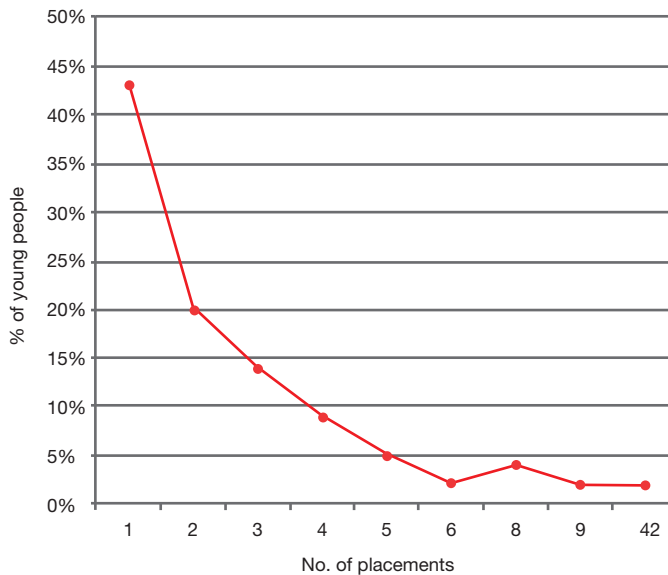
Type of last care placement: 51% (33) of young people had spent their last placement in foster care and 28% (18) had been in residential care. A further, 9% (6) were in supported lodgings and 11% (7) were in 'other' placements.⁴

Length of time in care: 34% (22) of young people had spent 1-5 years in care; 11% (7) had been in care for 6-10 years; and 39% (25) of young people had spent more than 10 years in care.⁵

Current care status: At R1, 20% (13) of young people were in a care placement, which fell to 2% (1) at R2. At R2, 32% (21) of young people were in a 'continuing care placement', mostly still living with their former foster carers. A further 19% (12) were in an aftercare placement, e.g. supported or semi-independent accommodation. The remaining 48% (31) of young people were not in any type of placement.⁶

Total number of placements in care: Young people were most likely to have had one or two placements during their time in care. However, 15% (8) had five or more care placements, including one young person who had 42 different placements (see Chart 1).

Chart 1: Total number of care placements (N=56)



⁴'Other' placements included emergency accommodation, supported accommodation and living at home with a parent.

⁵The remaining cases were unknown.

⁶Most of these young people were living with birth/extended family, friends or in private rented accommodation.



Main Findings

Accommodation

One of the main ways in which young people's circumstances can change when they leave care relates to their housing or living situations. Over time, young people were less likely to be living in a foster, birth or extended family home – 52% (34) at R1 and 37% (24) at R2. This corresponded with an increase in the number who lived in semi-independent or supported accommodation (from 17% at R1 to 20% at R2) and in private rented accommodation (from 14% at R1 to 19% at R2). So by R2, just over one third of young people were living in a family environment and there was a tendency for others to move towards semi-independent or independent living situations.

Stability in accommodation

One third of young people, 35% (23), had no accommodation moves over the last 21 months.⁷ Most of these young people had their last care placement in foster care (n=18). A further 34% (22) had one or two moves. However, 31% (20) had experienced three or more moves in the last 21 months, half of whom were currently living in private rented accommodation. Further analysis showed that young people who had moved at least three times were at greater risk of being homeless at some stage during their transition from care.

“I was in *[crisis intervention service]* for a month. Then I moved back in with my mam for like a few weeks. On New Year's Day I went into *[emergency accommodation]* and I was there until March. And then I got a placement in *[short term accommodation]* and I was there 'til the end of April. And then I was in *[emergency accommodation]* for like 4 days because I was getting in here *[aftercare residential placement]*.”
(Karen, 18)

Educational attainment and participation

The highest educational attainment reached by nearly half of the young people, 46% (30), was the Leaving Certificate or equivalent (including those in further education). A further 39% (25) left secondary school after taking the Junior Certificate and 12% (8) left school with no formal qualifications.

“I didn't do my Leaving Cert so I couldn't get into a regular college *[course]* during the day.”

(Ciara, 18)

These results need to be considered in terms of the educational needs of some of the young people. In particular, 20% (13) were said to have had gaps in their schooling due to placement breakdown (5) and poor school attendance (5).⁸ Therefore, aspects of young people's care placement history should be taken into account by educational professionals, other practitioners and policy makers when developing ways to encourage young people's continued participation in education.



⁷Information on the number of accommodation moves was collected for the 12 months before Round 1 and the time between Rounds 1 and 2 (approximately 9 months), making it possible to calculate the number of moves in the last 21 months.

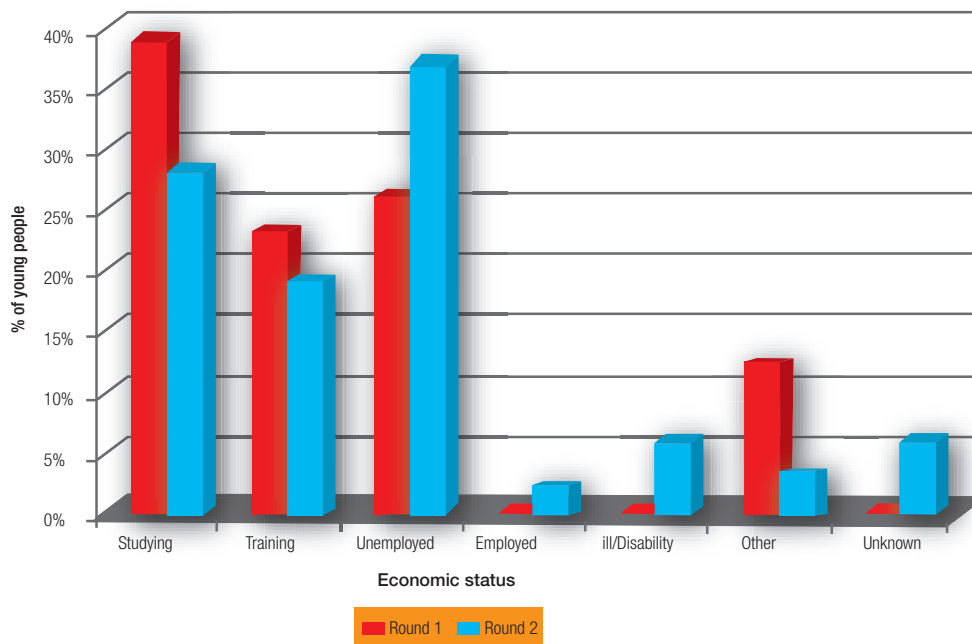
⁸Only 2 of these 13 young people had sat the Leaving Certificate exam.

“I was going to school. It was a struggle given that the place was far away. I don’t think that it’s [name of adult homeless hostel] a place for anyone who’s going to school like.” (Peter, 18)

Economic status

Over time, young people were less likely to be studying or doing a training course and more likely to be unemployed (see Chart 2). The number of young people who were studying fell from 39% (25) at R1 to 28% (18) at R2. Much of this decline was due to young people finishing secondary school. At R2, 13 young people were engaged in further education beyond second level, which represented 20% of all young people in the study.⁹ Those involved in training courses fell slightly from 23% (15) at R1 to 19% (12) at R2.¹⁰ In contrast, there was an increase in unemployment from 26% (17) at R1 to 37% (24) at R2. As a result, an increasing number of young people were dependant on social welfare as their main source of income: 31% (20) at R1 compared to 42% (27) at R2.

Chart 2: Young people’s economic status at Rounds 1 and 2 (N=65)



Young people’s economic status was associated with their educational attainment. At R2, young people who had obtained the Leaving Certificate were significantly more likely to be engaged in further education compared to those who had reached the Junior Certificate or those who had no formal qualifications.

⁹Young people were most likely to be taking a Fetac course while 3 young people were studying for a Diploma.

¹⁰Most young people were doing a FAS course.



Main Findings continued

Health and well-being

Mental health needs

At R1, 31% (20) of young people were reported to have mental health needs by their Aftercare Worker. This increased to 39% (25) at R2. Examples of such needs included low mood/depression, suicidal behaviour and anger management. Counselling was identified as the most common type of health service that young people needed and as one they were not currently receiving.

“I was only diagnosed a few weeks ago with depression. But I feel that it was there for a longer time than just since I moved in here.” (*Sarah, 18*)

Social support

Appropriate social supports are important for any young person during the transition to adulthood but are especially critical for young people leaving care who may face greater challenges during this period.

Contact with birth family

Just over half of young people, 54% (35), had contact with at least one birth family member on a weekly basis at R1. This fell slightly to 46% (40) at R2. Young people were most likely to have contact with siblings followed by their birth mother.

“It can be a bit lonely at times so I used to stay over with my mother or go over for dinner.” (*Sean, 19*)

Significant adult

At R1, 86% (56) of young people were said to have at least one adult they could turn to for advice and support. This was 83% (54) at R2. Examples included foster carers, siblings, parents, grandparents and Aftercare Workers.

Aftercare support

The majority of young people agreed to receive an aftercare service, 75% (49) at R1 and 69% (45) at R2. One fifth of young people were not currently engaging or had not agreed to receive aftercare supports, 22% (14) at R1 and 23% (15) at R2.¹¹ Over time, young people's contact with Aftercare Workers became less frequent.

Independent living skills

The number of young people who were deemed to have the appropriate skills to live independently increased from 28% (18) at R1 to 45% (29) at R2. While practical skills were rated well, areas where young people needed to improve or to learn included paying rent regularly, managing a budget, and dealing with government agencies.

“You learn eventually how to budget your money. It's trial and error 'cos I had done my plans with my Aftercare Worker and my Keyworker but it's just putting them into action is a different story like.” (*Helen, 18*)

“Being 18 doesn't mean that you're a full adult, like in your mind. I was expected to be an adult within a few days of turning 18 like. It's like 'Oh God.'” (*Adele, 19*)

¹¹By R2, 6 cases had been closed by Aftercare Workers: 4 young people were not engaging; 1 had moved to the UK; and 1 case was closed due to an allegation. However 2 of these young people had been referred to aftercare services in a voluntary service provider.



Importance of stability in care placement for positive outcomes

An analysis was carried out to examine factors associated with more positive outcomes for young people leaving care. Positive outcomes were defined as living in the same accommodation between R1 and R2; taking part in further education/training; and the absence of mental health needs. Positive outcomes were more likely where young people:

- ◆ had been in foster care during their last placement;¹²
- ◆ had been in their last placement for more than 5 years;
- ◆ had fewer placements in care; and
- ◆ were living in the same placement after turning 18, i.e. were still living with their former foster carers.

These findings suggest that young people leaving care are more likely to have positive outcomes when they have had a stable care background with few placement moves and had remained in their last (foster) care placement after reaching the age for leaving care.

Summary of main findings

The findings show that many young people in the study who were receiving aftercare supports in North Dublin faced particular challenges including:

- ◆ having experienced several accommodation moves during the transition to independent living which was associated with a greater risk of homelessness;
- ◆ difficulties when attempting to find employment or to access further education or training;
- ◆ dependency on social welfare as their main source of income;
- ◆ coping with the difficulties arising from having mental health needs;

- ◆ lacking some of the necessary skills to live independently, in particular budgeting skills.

Key Messages for Policy and Practice

- ◆ Achieving stability in young people's care placements helps to promote more positive outcomes for young people leaving care. Ensuring that placements meet young people's needs and providing supports to maintain placements can help to prevent multiple placement moves.
- ◆ Remaining in the same care placement after a young person turns 18 (where this is possible) can provide the continuity and security needed for a more successful transition to adulthood.
- ◆ All young people leaving care should have access to quality aftercare supports. Young people leaving care face particular difficulties and challenges compared to their peers. Current legislation does not give young people leaving care a statutory right to aftercare services.
- ◆ Further research is needed on young people's outcomes when leaving care. This should include a comparison of outcomes for young people who receive aftercare supports and those who do not.
- ◆ Any future research should involve young people who have left care and take their views into account.

¹² This result does not mean that young people whose last care placement was not in foster care had poor outcomes but rather young people in foster care were more likely to score highly for positive outcomes.