Permanence and Transitions in Residential Care

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Residential care - current issues

- Residential Care Review (Hart et al, 2015, Department for Education)
  - A last resort? Purposes of care - from family support to care and upbringing; ordinary / therapeutic / treatment / secure estate
  - Outcomes / need for further research
- Staying put in residential care
- Care Inquiry – relationships as golden thread
- Alliance for children in care and care leavers – new vision

NB Uncertainty about the risks and benefits of residential care is combined with austerity / budget pressures
Background to this study

• Break is a charity based in Norfolk that provides residential care and other child welfare services

• ‘Since our mission is to provide stable, longer term care, we should no longer think in terms of young people ‘leaving care’: instead, we should continue to be there for them, in flexible ways, as they make the transition into adult life.’ (Break bid to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation 2011)

• Funded development of the Break Moving On / Transitions service (2012-15)

• Funded evaluation by UEA (Gillian Schofield, Emma Ward and Birgit Larsson)
The Moving On /Transitions Team

• Set up to support young people move from Break residential care into adulthood

• Currently working with young people who left some years ago, those who left recently- and those in Break on a transitions pathway plan
Permanence and residential care? (1)

- Permanence is the long term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

(Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (DfE 2015, Vol 2 para. 2.3)
Permanence and residential care? (2)

- It is also important to think about the needs of older children and young people in relation to achieving permanence in their lives. They may not be able to live with birth parents for a variety of reasons nor wish to be in a foster home or to be adopted but prefer to live in a children’s home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging.

(Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (DfE 2015, Vol 2 para. 2.3)
Methods

[Contextual quantitative data on young people who had left Break Children’s Homes: supplied by Professor June Thoburn, a Trustee of Break. ]

- Interviews with 20 young people who had left or were in the process of leaving Break’s care

- A focus group with predominantly residential staff from Break

- Interviews with transitions workers
### Duration of residence at BREAK Children’s Home (n=81)

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*Missing data 9

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NEET Outcomes – Break 19,20,21 year olds

June 2015 [11 Active Involvements (100~11) = 9.09]

- Education (2) = 18%
- Training / Apprenticeships (2) = 18%
- Employment (5) = 46%
- NEET (2) = 18% [March 2015 UK Care Leavers 38% (19,20 & 21yrs)]
Narrative analysis of the young people’s interviews

• Focus on the life stories young people tell - how they see themselves and the roles they played

• Stories from birth family, into care, into Break, in Break, moving on from Break / transitions, adult selves

• For this study - we also linked to Mike Stein’s analysis of leaving care outcomes (Stein 2012)
  – Moving on
  – Surviving
  – Struggling
Key concepts in young people’s narratives

• Connection – relationships, family and belonging
• Agency – making choices, feeling effective
• Constructive activity
• Coherence of the narrative – capacity to reflect

NB Risk and resilience
Five different narrative pathways from childhood to young adulthood

1. Love and loss to moving on
2. Victim to survivor
3. Victim to struggling
4. ‘Bad child’ to survivor
5. ‘Bad child’ to struggling
1. Love and loss to moving on

- On balance, positive pre-care childhood, at least one loving family caregiver, lost through death or separation-in care placements prior to Break

- Break was a positive experience – ‘moving on’ with resilience and social capital (e.g. education, constructive activity, positive networks, prosocial strategies.)

- Agency and valuing connection - seeking help flexibly from a range of people, including transitions workers

- Coherent life story, balanced / positive about self and others.
1. Experiences in Break-feeling settled / constructive activity

It was more permanent, sort of... The staff are nice, but much better obviously because it is more settled. It is like I knew I was going to be there for some time. ...I could settle a bit more... because I had my own room I could pick my own colours, everything like that.

At the time I had no intention of going to university but she (Break worker) said, ‘Well why don’t we put it in your Pathway Plan’ ... I was like fair enough.

I didn’t do very well in school and it wasn’t until I went to college and started doing something that I really enjoyed that I started to excel academically.
1. Moving on and adult selves

- Multiple personal and external resources
- Mainly resolved feelings about loss and the past
- Valuing but not dependent on transitions staff
- Sense of creating their own pathway- with support

Whereas most people have their morals and values imbedded in them by their parents, I have been brought up by so many different people that I have kind of created like my own person.
2. Victim to survivor

• Early childhood- described themselves as victims of abuse, neglect and rejection

• Contrast between early maltreatment and subsequent good relationship experiences in Break are reflected on as a form of ‘rescue’.

• Transformation from a victim identity to that of a survivor, can connect with others and have agency to make choices.

• Some vulnerabilities persisted – survival is threatened by loss of employment or relationships, with victimhood resurfacing. Open door to support from transitions workers is necessary.
2. In and moving on from Break

In Break they don’t want to let go of their young people, they want to keep hold of them, so I think in that perspective that is good, really, because it is like they are not giving up on them.

They said, “We have all loved you - you are a good lad with good potential”
2. Moving on – but staying connected

I just kind of got scared because I thought ...that they would drop me and like they wouldn’t get in contact with me - and they do. Sometimes they ring me on my phone to see how I am doing.

They still treat me as if I am in care because like they don’t ever want me to lose contact with them... I would recommend Break – the best children’s home anyone could ever ask for.
3. Victim to struggling

- Childhood identity as **victim** of maltreatment is largely unresolved / confirmed by subsequent experiences in placements.

- Feeling **singled out for rejection** led to a persistent sense that life was unfair. Emotional demands / **disappointment**.

- Adult selves - **lacked agency**. Demanding of and sometimes grateful for transitions workers’ time, but feelings of **rejection and victimhood** resurfaced.

- A challenge for transitions workers - to promote **agency and autonomy** while meeting young people’s **emotional needs**.
3. Looking back – loss of Break

They was like helping me out... they did have a timetable for a weekly plan ...if I wanted an activity, if I wanted to go out, if I felt stressed they would take me out for a drink ...and basically they was like a father and mother to us...it is hard to let go of them now because it is like picking up areas does hurt even more.

They go on so much about having a family like making family with them at Break and then as soon as you have, you are kicked out.
4. ‘Bad child’ to survivor

- Abuse, rejection, moves were a result of their behaviour, their fault as ‘bad children’ e.g. ‘little devil’ ‘little terror’

- **Transformation** experienced at Break. Staff are given credit for sticking by them in spite of their ‘bad’ behaviour and supporting them to change. **Turning points** as they started to behave better, to take responsibility, to be better people.

- For some, becoming a ‘survivor’ occurred in **early adulthood**
  As young adults - awareness of how far they had come, their belief in Break, **availability** of transitions staff gave **hope**.

- **Agency** and **connection** based on a sense of belonging were present, although vulnerabilities continued.
4. I was a difficult child

I was about seven or eight - I was quite a nasty brawler.

My granddad had died which my mum then got into a distress and just couldn’t cope. The whole family kind of shuddered apart.

I am not proud of my fights now. I look back on them and regret them, but at the time I wasn’t afraid of no-one, it didn’t matter what size they were to me.
Some explanations for being ‘bad’?

I got diagnosed with ADHD at the age of five and learning difficulties. I was a little devil because I used to get my sister’s head and smack it on the concrete or drown her in the swimming pool.

I always used to kick off, umm. I always used to hurt my mum and all that because I grew up really violent with my dad, umm.

I always used to hurt my mum and family so that is one of the reasons I got put in care because I have got ADHD, speech problems and anger problems.
4. Care at Break- feeling valued

- Solving problems together
  
  I would speak to them about it and sit down and say ‘Look...this is my problem. How do we deal with it from here?’ and they would say, ‘Well this is our problem and we can see your side, but this is how we dealt with it and the reason we dealt with it.’ They are very good listeners.

- New relationships with multiple roles
  
  I see them (Break staff) as it was like everything, like carers, friends, family because they were there mainly every day and I treated them like as family, friends, carers.
If I buy anything it is out of my pocket and I can look back on myself and I haven’t sponged off the government. I don’t need their money, I have my own, I have worked for it.

If it wasn’t for Break I wouldn’t have no flat, no job, I would have nothing, I would be like basically homeless I would.
5. ‘Bad child’ to struggling

- Sense of themselves as ‘bad children’ who had caused or deserved rejection, maltreatment, removal into care

- The sense of self-blame persisted - some positive experiences at Break but no significant transformation experience. Their behaviour was said to link to being ‘kicked out’ of Break

- Subsequent downward spirals, including self-harm, heavy drug use.

- They blamed their own behaviour for losing Break and either longed to keep the connection through transitions and other Break staff or maintained an angry and resentful stance against everyone including Break or both.
5. Into care / on the move - whose fault?

Well kind of in some way it must be my fault you know. I must have done something wrong. ...The reason why I see I went into care is because of me, because I was so naughty...

- Moves between placements, with bad behaviour escalating

Just because of my behaviour...I would just kick off to get attention.

It was like terrible. I was going out getting in trouble every day with the police, it was just the way I was, yeah...
5 Different accounts of Break

Some positive experiences

I could just sit there and talk to him about anything and he don’t judge you.

Two and a half years – the longest place I stayed. It was welcoming.

But also-preoccupation with violence

It’s like a prison environment, based on violence.

They don’t discipline people enough – need to bring back corporal punishment and it will stop it all because these kids only understand violence.

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5. Adult selves

- Reflecting on (past) violence
  
  My actions are completely beyond my control, like literally completely beyond my control. I can punch someone in the face and not even realise that I have done it until after I have done and no anger there just pumph and it is like ‘why the f- did I do that?’

- Sense of loss and regret

  But living on my own, being homeless and that through the time of leaving Break messed with my head and if I had never left Break I would be fine, I would have a job or I would be driving but I was stupid and got kicked out.
Different narratives, different trajectories, different support needs: key messages

- How young people see themselves, the meanings they attach to their own histories, will have a significant impact on their trajectory

- Very troubled children - different starting points – but some surprisingly stable, successful pathways over time

- Some children who were unresolved and still ‘struggling’ may nevertheless have benefited from care/support

- All needed support during transition to adulthood
Pathways through residential care: common themes

• What children brought to residential care – strengths and difficulties, loss, abuse and neglect
• Experiences in the children’s home – nurture, activity, sometimes conflict, sense of family
• Transitions support
Before I left I said to them, you’re like my actual family, because I have got my actual family, but you are like a second family. You have helped me through life when it gets tough.

Instead of it being a house it became an actual home for us where we could actually feel like where we lived was a family.

They spoke to you like a family, ‘How are you today?’ Like any mum and dad would do.
Because you have been living in a Children’s Home for like four years and you get attached to them, but when it is time for you to leave it is actually kind of sad and emotional. You know you are going to realise that you are not always going to wake up everyday, going downstairs, it is not going to be the same, so it is kind of hard.
Support from the transitions service: practical and emotional

She come round here like nine o’clock in the morning and she went about half one, two o’clock in the afternoon and she had all my bills set up, direct debits. So I reckon they should do more transitions workers, they should, because they are good for like young people leaving care homes.

The transitions worker helps me, they just help me to talk - they talk about how my life has been, how are you coping, are you buying enough food, are you doing this, they are making sure I am alright.
As far as I know, the transitions service is indefinite. It is designed to be not like a stop off point. They will always be there. There will always be a Break transitions service.
Residential staff views: new residents

The worker would go to meet her, be there for her first tea, be there on her first shift and introduce her to each person individually –so that as the weeks go by she would feel more comfortable.

• Challenges of a new resident coming into a group of young people

Sometimes you are just thrown a hand grenade and you have got these unsettled young people and then you put someone else in and for both sets of people, the ones coming in and the ones already there it can be a complete disaster. It is really hard –you feel a bit of pressure to take someone if there is a vacancy.
It’s just a natural thing. I am the key worker for a younger child and especially during the first few months I would just be at home watching TV and I know MasterChef came on and they made spag bol and I immediately went, ‘Oh that is her favourite dinner’. And I would be walking along the street and going ‘Oh she would really like that’ and so I think it is a natural thing. I don’t think it is something you can train yourself to do.

When you get back from holiday the key child is pleased to see you - you have brought back a little gift so you hold them in mind. You prepare them before you go and you bring them a little something, even if it’s a stick of rock: ‘I was thinking about you. I thought you might like this’.
Availability / held in mind

I guess it comes from the philosophy of what you would do with your own child. You are constantly thinking, ‘I wonder how they are getting on at school today? I wonder..’. You are the parent!

They come home from school and their bedroom is done and it’s lovely and it’s ready and waiting for them and we have been thinking about them and who is going to pick them up from school and give them that kind of early experience that they didn’t have really of being loved.
A few weeks ago we knew that (two female residents) wanted to go bowling so during the day I called up the bowling alley and booked it- and they when they came back from school, ‘Oh you know I was thinking about you today and I know you like bowling so I have booked this for you while you were at school’ and for them that was really positive because they were like ‘Oh thanks for thinking about us’ and they had a really good night
We can say that we love the children now and we do. It is an arduous task sometimes but what gets you through is the fact that you are going to stick by them and you love them.

Four or five years ago everybody was pretty much scared witless to show love, affection, nurture. This sterile and non-nurturing environment has changed hugely.

We needed someone to say ‘It’s OK to do that’ in that risk averse culture.

And I think the children have flourished because of that. There is a different care - there are not the restraints and there are not the complaints and they do feel loved and nurtured.
I think when they get to that transitions stage their stress behaviour, that they have learned from when they were tiny, all comes out and we have found 18 year olds that will go back to being 8 - ‘I can’t look after myself, I can’t wash, I can’t do this.’ They recall that time and they are absolutely terrified.

It sets a good example...because ours are saying ‘Well I know I will keep seeing you because the boys still come back’.
Residential staff views of the transitions team

I think every opportunity that our young people have had in the last few years has come from the transitions team and not from the social worker.

You’ve got to have the same philosophy haven’t you? We have got a shared philosophy here that we carry on the love and care.

Ultimately we are not telling the young person ‘Oh we can’t see you this week because we have to try and find your social worker’ we are saying ‘OK we will deal with the problems where we are now’.
Transitions team: Offering continuity

- Meeting young people for the first time – as part of Break
- Being around in children’s homes, known, trusted and familiar.

*Chatting to staff and young people that are about, because there are young people who will be coming up to sixteen so will start to become on our radar.*
From the age of 16 onwards we are teaching skills to become more self-sufficient and actually be able to manage themselves, so when there is a crisis it is not just they are reliant on us, they can be a bit more resourceful themselves.

Sadly you sometimes have to allow them to make mistakes to actually learn from them... and just be there for back up if they need you. So we advise and support but we can’t rule their lives and we can’t take over their lives so we just make sure they know we are available.
Prioritising the needs of young people

I had switched my phone off for 20 minutes and had seven missed calls from young people. Some days you don’t hear from anyone and another day it is just like everybody needs you so it is just about prioritising and thinking who needs you most at the time, because in their minds they all need you.

I had a young man who rang up and said ‘I need help with my water bill’ and another young lady who rung up to say her mum had set herself on fire- you just have to prioritise the need.
Offering support - but living with risk

- Sometimes supporting young people in less than ideal circumstances that are beyond Break’s control

The children we have come in are very damaged and the staff work damn hard to get this young person able to be more sociable and to present well in society and then we sadly sometimes put them into a home where there are drugs and some of the young people there use. Then you feel you have sort of, it is a bit of vicious circle, you think ‘Oh God, I am putting the young person who has changed his life so much back into that environment and you think - Oh this is quite damaging again....’
Examples of practical and emotional support—and transformation

I support him first thing in the morning to get up and ready for work. Mondays are difficult for him so on Monday I will go in at quarter past seven, assist him with his morning routine, reminding him to get showered, find his uniform, make sure he has got his wallet and keys—and that just sets him up for the rest of the week.

His flat was absolutely disgusting, bags of rubbish, so with quite a lot of intensive support this young person is now in a spotlessly clean and newly decorated flat which is what he asked. He has had new furniture that he paid for himself, he is working full time, he is smart and presentable—the transformation in this young man is absolutely amazing.
A lot of the young people now, through the Moving on team, are feeling that they can actually get back in touch with their units, just phone them up and say, you know, ‘Hello, how are you doing, it’s me and I have just got my first flat’ or ‘I have just been offered a place at college’ or ‘I am about to be a dad or mum’. The units are saying that the young people are now feeling they can actually get back in touch and sometimes go back when it is appropriate and see them and have a coffee and just say hello again.
The significant change in the service

It was quite obvious that at 18, sometimes sooner, they were just black bags, gone, never saw them again – sometimes heard from them with a phone call. So I am very happy to be part of it, in fact I am proud to be part of the team that works with young people and gets them settled into normal life, something that young people with their own parents sometimes take for granted.
She is just fun to have around. She’s a lovely lady. If it weren’t for her I probably still wouldn’t be ringing up about the bills. She would ring up like the council because I wouldn’t have a clue. I would be like, ‘You ring them, I don’t want to ring them’. And I would be just watching her and I am like, ‘At least I don’t have to do it’. It got to the point like, ‘No, I’ll do it now, I’ll do it.’ But she’ll still come round for coffee. I don’t see her as often and I don’t really notice that, but I think it’s because I don’t need her as much. I still think she is there if I need her. If I got really stuck in the dirt I can turn to her and just sort of say, ‘I need help’.
Implications for policy and practice: questions for discussion

- Residential care in relation to permanence, security and belonging?

- Role of transitions work / a transitions team?

- Connections between the two?