

Refuge for Young Runaways in the UK:

A Critical Overview

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RAILWAY
children

THE VOICE FOR STREET CHILDREN WORLDWIDE

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Introduction

This paper addresses the present situation relating to refuge provision in the UK for children and young people under the age of sixteen who are away from home or care. Since 1985 a number of refuges have opened and closed in England, Wales and Scotland and government, through The Department of Health (DoH)/The Department of Education and Skills (DfES)¹ invested two million pounds in six pilot projects over a two year period that ended in March 2006. At present there are two Section 51 refuges with a total of nine beds for the whole of the UK – The London Refuge and The Glasgow Refuge. A third refuge, provided by Safe at Last in South Yorkshire, is in the process of applying for Section 51 certification and is presently providing a service for children and young people where parental permission is obtained. Once certification is awarded, there will be eleven refuge beds available in the UK.

Structure of the paper

This paper begins by considering the concept of refuge and includes an exploration of:

- the definition of refuge
- aims of refuge
- the legal framework for refuge
- the difference between refuge and other forms of emergency accommodation

A brief history of refuge for children and young people under sixteen is offered which includes a description of DoH/DfES pilot programme to establish six community-based refuges.

The paper moves on to discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of refuge and includes discussion of the differences, merits and flaws of both fixed and flexible forms of refuge.

The second part of the paper considers in some detail the DoH/DfES' pilot programme of community-based refuge.

This section describes each of the six pilot programmes and the approach taken to gather learning from each pilot project and highlights, where possible, the main points of learning.

Finally, a number of concluding comments and recommendations are offered.

¹ The pilot programme of community-based refuge was, in the first instance, a DoH initiative; responsibility for this programme of work then moved to the DfES.

1. The Concept of Refuge

Refuge

In its broadest sense, refuge describes any place that offers shelter or protection from danger or trouble. In relation to runaways, refuge is for children and young people under the age of sixteen who have run away, been thrown out or are on the streets for any other reasons and are vulnerable or at risk of harm either because of their own actions or those of others.

Refuge provision for children and young people has a number of aims, primarily:

- providing somewhere safe and confidential for children and young people to stay thereby minimising or preventing harm from both the place the child or young person ran away from or the place they would otherwise run too;
- providing access to advice and support for a short period in order to address the circumstances and reasons why the young person ran away and any associated issues;
- to reconcile the child or young person with his/her family where possible or appropriate;
- or to divert the child or young person to other suitable services or accommodation.

Many children and young people who run away from home or care are not in need of refuge accommodation. However there are a significant minority of children and young people who are in need of safe and confidential accommodation.

Refuge cannot operate effectively as a stand-alone service for children and young people who run away, or are away from home or care for other reasons, but should exist as part of a range of services to address the needs of young runaways. Refuge is able to provide short-term crisis-intervention that ensures intensive support. To enable longer-term needs to be met, wrap-around services are required, that may be provided by the refuge provider or other organisations, and refuge should constitute one component of an integrated service for children and young people who run away.

One of the defining features of refuge is that children and young people are able to directly access refuge and this access is commonly mediated by the child or young person who may self-refer through a free-phone number or with the assistance of another agency.

The legal framework for refuge

In Scotland refuges were made legal and operate under Section 38 of The Children's (Scotland) Act 1995. In England and Wales, refuges were made legal and operate under Section 51 of The Children's Act 1989 which protects refuge projects from prosecution of 'harbouring' a young runaway and applies to:

- a service established to operate solely as a refuge
- registered children's homes providing refuge
- foster carers providing refuge

This section of The Children's Act overrides the requirement for the person who has parental responsibility for a child to give consent when a child stays away overnight. Section 51 of The Children's Act 1989 maintains provision of young people who are in need of a safe place to stay for up to fourteen days when a child is deemed at risk of significant harm. Under Section 51 a registered voluntary children's home or foster carer can be exempt from the provisions of Section 49 (abduction) and the Child Abduction Act 1984².

It is also necessary for a refuge to meet *National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes*³. Whilst the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) provides guidance for children's homes including Section 51 refuge, no guidance is offered that explicitly relates to refuge other than the requirement to fulfil the minimum standards for children's homes. The requirement to register under standards for children's homes can cause a number of tensions for refuge providers as, by its very definition, a refuge operates in a distinct manner. For example, a fundamental difference between a refuge and a children's home is that a child or young person is free to leave *refuge at any time*. There are also a number of policies outlined in the *National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes* that are suitable for children's homes but not refuge. Examples of this include the medical policy and policies relating to outdoor activities. Recent experience has revealed that the process of achieving certification can be lengthy as there is limited understanding of the role of refuge amongst those involved in the process of granting certification. Therefore, a factor that hinders the development of refuge is the lack of legislation relating to running a refuge and the associated tensions involved in the process of registering as a children's home and operating as a refuge.

The Refuges (Children's Homes and Foster Placements) Regulations 1991 set out the terms of the Secretary of State's certificate which include the following terms:

- notifying the Police within twenty-four hours;
- the Police will inform the responsible person, for example, the parent, that the child is in refuge without disclosing the location of the refuge;
- informing the police when a child or young person leaves refuge;
- refuge may only be provided for up to fourteen days and for no longer than twenty-one days in any three month period.

² Section 30 of The Children's (Scotland) Act 1995 largely covers the same ground as Section 51 of The Children's Act 1989 but is not addressed in any depth in this paper.

³ Department of Health (2002) *Children's Homes: National Minimum Standards, Children's Homes Regulations* London: Department of Health.

Refuge and other forms of emergency accommodation

Refuge is not the only option for children in need of safe emergency accommodation. Where a parent can be contacted and gives consent, a local authority can accommodate a runaway under Section 20 of The Children's Act 1989. Under Section 21 of this Act, all local authorities have a duty to make accommodation available for children who are placed under police protection (Section 46 of The Children's Act 1989) which can last for up to 72 hours. Under Section 44 of the same Act, local authorities also have the power to apply for emergency accommodation orders if they need to look after a child at short notice, or following a period of police protection, where there is evidence that a child may be at risk.

To highlight the fundamental differences between refuge and other forms of emergency accommodation:

- there is provision for refuge to accommodate a child or young person without parental consent for up to fourteen days;
- a child or young person can self refer and obtain direct access to refuge without involvement from other agencies.

It is important that refuge is viewed by children and young people as maintaining independence from state provided forms of emergency accommodation as children and young people who run away from home and care do not always approach state controlled services because there is no perceived difference between emergency accommodation and local authority provision. To address both this issue and that of striving to avoid turning refuge into another residential unit, it is crucial to ensure that the provision of refuge remains autonomous and able to meet its potential to affect real change in a child or young person's life. In light of this, voluntary organisations are best placed to provide refuge as they can remain autonomous from local and central government and are viewed as such by children and young people who may perceive any state intervention as policing and, hence, to be mistrusted.

A brief history of refuge in the UK

In 1985 The Children's Society opened the first refuge for young runaways, The Central London Teenage Project. In 1989 Southside in Bournemouth began operating a refuge for young people. Leeds Safe House, a residential refuge, opened in 1991; and in 1993 The Porth Project provided accommodation through a network of refuge foster carers. After the closure of The Central London Teenage Project in 1994, Centrepoin and NSPCC opened The London Refuge in 1995. In 2000 The London Refuge closed temporarily and in April 2001 The London Refuge reopened under the management of St Christopher's. With the exception of The London Refuge, all other refuge projects ceased to operate by the end of 2000.

In September 2003 interested parties were invited to apply for a government grant from Choice Protects to provide a pilot programme to establish community-based refuges and, from 2004 to 2006, the DoH/DfES funded six pilot flexible community-based accommodation schemes for young runaways. One of these, the London

Refuge, was a registered refuge and four projects focused on building capacity within local authority accommodation in County Durham, Bradford, Liverpool and Leicestershire. The sixth project in Torquay provided accommodation attached to a voluntary sector project for runaways⁴. Funding for these projects came to an end in March 2006.

In 2004 Aberlour established a refuge in Scotland which is managed by its Glasgow based project, Running – Other Choices (ROC). The Glasgow Refuge provides three beds in a fixed refuge in a confidential location. Having learnt from experiences of previous refuges, the Glasgow Refuge operates with a flexible staffing system which results in costs being maintained at a relatively low level. ROC's model of practice ensures that support is provided for children and young people once they leave refuge.

The London Refuge is still in operation and has six beds. However there are a number of uncertainties about its future due to financial issues and its viability as a service.

In April 2007 Safe at Last opened a two bed fixed refuge at a confidential location in South Yorkshire. At present, at mentioned previously, Safe at Last are in the process of seeking certification for refuge status and is working with children and young people where parental permission is obtained. Safe at Last have commissioned an evaluation of the refuge that will focus upon gathering the views of children of young people of their time in refuge and how the intervention has impacted upon their lives.

There has been limited effort to evaluate the impact that refuge can make on a child or young person's life, though what learning that has been captured reveals a number of positive impacts of refuge.

Distinguishing between different forms of refuge

The term 'refuge' is used to describe both fixed and flexible refuges.

Fixed refuge refers to a model of refuge where the refuge is in a fixed confidential location in a building that operates solely as a refuge twenty-four hours a day and where all work with a child or young person takes place. Fixed refuge is usually located in an urban area where there is likely to be a large population base and thus significant demand for refuge.

The term 'flexible refuge' is used to describe two other forms of refuge that are not open twenty-four hours a day but respond to demand by providing refuge when a child or young person is identified as being in need of refuge. Foster care and crash pad models are examples of flexible refuge.

The foster care model is that where accommodation is provided for children and young people in the home of adults who have received training to enable them to provide high quality support to runaways. Foster carers may be those employed by Social Services or may operate in a system outside of that provided by Social Services. Whilst the foster carers provide a caring role to meet the child or young person's physical and practical needs, focused problem-solving type work is carried outside of the foster placement by, for example, project workers or social workers.

⁴ More information about these six projects is provided in Section 2 of the report

The term 'crash pad' is often used to describe the model of refuge where refuge is linked to a project and/or office base that provides general support for young runaways.

*Strengths and weaknesses of flexible refuge in comparison with fixed refuge*⁵

In the past, flexible models of refuge were viewed as being more cost effective than fixed refuge, though practice has revealed less differences in cost than may be assumed⁶. It is also important to consider, alongside costs, the counterbalancing strengths and weaknesses of, for example, operational issues and benefits to children and young people⁷.

Maintaining a twenty-four hour emergency resource is problematic for both fixed and flexible refuge. In a fixed refuge, managing staff rotas is a time-consuming and a difficult task for management⁸. Where sessional workers are used, or foster carers provide refuge in a flexible model, there are a number of issues relating to recruiting, training and maintaining a body of staff. Past experiences has revealed that, in flexible refuge, there are times when there is an insufficient body of staff to provide refuge for a child or young person.

A fixed refuge is easier to operate than a flexible refuge, largely because the support needs of children and young people are met in one location and by project workers who are able to support and work with children and young people on site.

However, there are drawbacks of groups of children and young people living together in one location that can have a significant impact upon staff resources to deal with group dynamics⁹. A further drawback is the possibility that the diversity of children and young people using refuge may result in children and young people being introduced to new and risky activities by others¹⁰. Nonetheless these risks may be counterbalanced by:

*"the potential for mutually supportive relationships between young people with common experiences."*¹¹

A flexible admissions policy, such as that implemented by ROC at the Glasgow refuge, plays a crucial part in meeting the needs of children and young people and minimising the behaviours of individual children impacting upon others.

A dispersed model of flexible refuge such as accommodation provided by foster carers avoids some of the potential drawbacks of communal living as only one child or a young person is placed in a foster placement. It is acknowledged that whilst some children and young people would benefit from a foster placement, for example, younger children or LGB young people who may not approach a refuge for fear of intimidation and would feel safer in a family home than in a refuge, there are some children and young people for whom a placement in a family home would not be appropriate¹². This point highlights how different forms of refuge may be more appropriate for some sub-groups of children and young people than for others.

⁵ This section is largely taken from Smeaton E (2006) *A Review of the Process of Establishing a Flexible Refuge in Torquay* London: The Children's Society.

⁶ Rees G (2001) *Working with Young Runaways: Learning from Practice* London: The Children's Society.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Smeaton E and Rees G (2004) *Running Away in South Yorkshire* London: Safe at Last/The Children's Society.

Complexities of refuge

There have been a number of complex issues experienced by providers of refuge in the past, some of which have been acknowledged and documented. Whilst these issues have been significant and have made an impact both upon running and maintaining a refuge, the development and provision of refuge by both Aberlour and Safe at Last has revealed that providers of refuge have addressed a number of these complex issues, having learnt from past experience. Criticisms levelled against the effectiveness of refuge, appropriate a few years ago, are not necessarily the case now.

There have also been concerns raised about the cost of providing refuge as it has been identified as resource-intensive relating to both development and operation. This issue has been touched upon in the previous section comparing flexible and fixed refuge. However, it is important to note that, until recently¹³, no enquiry has been carried out to assess the costs of failing to respond to children and young people. Nor has there been any attempt to counterbalance costs of refuge with meeting children and young people's needs and assessing the longer-term benefit to children and young people¹⁴. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that refuge is a resource intensive intervention, learning from the models of refuge provided by Safe at Last and ROC highlights that refuge can be provided at costs that fall below the costs of subsequent models of refuge. In addition, the cost of providing refuge with its intensive support and preventative function should also be contextualised with the costs of alternatives such as placing children and young people in private care placements and secure units.

The cost of providing refuge to a child or young person is also not a fixed cost but dependent upon a number of variables such as, for example, the number of children and young people in refuge at the same time. Therefore, as previous providers of refuge have found that it takes time for a refuge to become established in an area and for referrals to increase, refuge becomes more cost effective in the longer-term. The cost of refuge for each individual child or young person will also depend upon their individual circumstances and need. It is important to recognise that through providing refuge and outreach/community work by refuge providers, further costs can be prevented.

At times, there has been an uneasy relationship between providers of refuge and local authorities, although it is important to acknowledge that refuge providers have also benefited from positive relationships with local authorities. Representatives from local authorities have expressed concerns that having a refuge in their area may attract children and young people from other areas who, once they present in the local authority's area, become the legal and financial responsibility of the local authority. It is often resource issues that are problematic for local authorities, alongside differences in working practices in relation to, for example, confidentiality. Particular issues have also been identified when a child or young person is accommodated by the local authority or when admission into substitute care is an appropriate response¹⁵.

As previously identified, past experience has revealed that staffing a refuge can be difficult; this has been the case for both fixed and flexible refuge.

¹³ Railway Children are presently carrying out work to provide indicative costs of to both the individual and society of failing to provide services to children and young people who experience being away from home or care; this work will include costings for refuge.

¹⁴ This issue is discussed further in the section addressing the London Refuge.

¹⁵ Ibid

Refuge is recognised as taking a significant amount of time to develop. Experience from practice has shown that it can take up to two years to develop and register a refuge¹⁶. However, part of the reason for a lengthy development phase can be linked to the lack of both knowledge of refuge in general and experience of those granting certification.

Practitioners have highlighted how providing refuge to a child or young person can sometimes slow down the responses of other agencies and that when refuge is not available, a speedier response from agencies has been witnessed¹⁷.

There are some groups of children and young people that refuge, as it presently stands, may not be appropriate for a number of reasons. For example, detached runaways, those away from home for longer periods of time who do not access formal systems of support, may find it difficult to adhere to the structured approach of refuge and conventional approaches of interventions and may feel restricted by all forms of refuge as they presently exist¹⁸.

The suitability of refuge for BME children and young people has also been questioned but experience has revealed that BME children and young people do access refuge and that measures can be adopted to assure BME children and young people that refuge is a safe form of emergency accommodation. For example, to avoid discrimination, bullying and any other form of abuse, refuge should be promoted as being for all children and young people. Such an ethos should be reinforced by a safe environment in refuge where it is made explicit that any form of prejudice, including racism and homophobia, will not be tolerated¹⁹.

How refuge supports children and young people

Protecting and meeting the needs of children and young people The concept of refuge was developed to both protect and meet the needs of children and young people who run away. Evidence from both practice and research has revealed how refuge can:

“offer instantly accessible and tangible services to young people which can prevent their exposure to the difficulties and risks of spending time ‘on the streets’, while helping them to try to resolve the issues that led to them running away in the first place.”²⁰

A recognised and important strength of refuge is its ability to provide a safety net for young runaways.

Refuge is also able to offer high degrees of anonymity and confidentiality which is important to those children and young people in highly dangerous situations who have a genuine fear that they may be tracked down by people intent upon harming them.

¹⁶ Rees G (2001) *Learning from practice: Working with Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society. Smeaton E (2006) *A Review of the Process of Establishing a Flexible Refuge in Torquay* London: The Children's Society.

¹⁷ Rees G (2001) *Learning from Practice: Working with Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.

¹⁸ Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.

¹⁹ Smeaton E and Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire* London: Safe at Last/The Children's Society.

²⁰ Rees G (2001) *Working with Young Runaways: Learning from Practice* London: The Children's Society.

The self-referring aspect of refuge that does not require the involvement of other agencies is also highly attractive to many children and young people. Learning from practice and research has shown that where children and young people can self-refer, interventions are likely to be more successful²¹.

Factors of importance to children and young people²²

Children and young people have acknowledged the importance of being able to access emergency accommodation twenty-four hours a day and identified this as a significantly positive aspect of fixed refuge. Children and young people recommended that any other form of refuge, or emergency accommodation, should be modified to incorporate ease of access.

Children and young people overwhelmingly preferred fixed refuge over other forms of refuge but also identified how, if a network of emergency accommodation was to be established, it would be beneficial to include foster care models of flexible refuge alongside fixed refuge as a 'home' environment would be beneficial for those children and young people who were more vulnerable because of age, mental state, ethnicity and sexuality. Children and young people also suggested that some children and young people may benefit from staying with foster carers at first and then moving on to fixed refuge once they had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with what is happening in their lives.

Whilst many children and young people were in favour of daytime drop-in projects for young runaways, there were fears that any form of refuge that was physically attached to a project would not provide a safe environment and that this would act as a barrier to children and young people seeking refuge.

Being safe was of fundamental importance to all children and young people but was of specific importance to younger children and for children and young people from minority groups.

Summary

As a concept and in practice, refuge holds a number of strengths and weaknesses. However, it is important to acknowledge the important contribution refuge can make to a network of emergency accommodation for young runaways. Whilst local authority emergency accommodation is a vital part of building a safe network of safe emergency accommodation for children and young people, it is recognised that some children and young people are suspicious or frightened, for whatever reason, of services provided by the local authority. Refuge provided by voluntary-sector organisations offers a more attractive option for some children and young people. It is also important to counterbalance the complexities involved in establishing and running a refuge with the impact refuge can make upon children and young people and the wider community.

²¹ Rees G Franks M Raws P & Medforth R (2005) *Responding to Young Runaways: An Evaluation of 19 Projects 2003 to 2004* London: Department of Education and Skills.

²² In 2003 seventy-one children and young people from a range of ethnic backgrounds participated, in a range of settings, in a consultation exercise to seek their views about the different forms of refuge. The findings of this consultation can be found in: Smeaton E and Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire* London: The Children's Society/Safe at Last.

2 DoH/DfES Pilot Programme of Community-Based Refuge

As mentioned in the introduction to the report, the DoH/DfES provided funding of two million pounds from Choice Protects for six pilot community-based refuge schemes for young runaways for 2004 – 2006. This section of the report outlines the main features of the six pilot models, describes the approaches taken to capture learning about the pilot project and identifies key learning points. The information presented about the six pilot projects is not consistent as there was no overall framework that the six projects were asked to adhere to and there are significant differences between learning captured by the six projects.

Bradford Community Refuge Project

The Bradford Community Refuge Project provided access to emergency foster carers and day care under Section 20. The aim of this project was to extend already existing services provided by Crisis Care and Placement Support within Social Services and Barnardos' Missing in Yorkshire service. This was to be achieved by providing dedicated social work support, up to forty-eight hours care where needed through emergency foster carers plus day care to young runaways aged under eighteen who are not current Social Services clients.

Funding from Choice Protects was therefore used to build upon existing service provision and the model did not include a refuge element as the accommodation element was established under Section 20.

A number of problems were experienced which impacted upon establishing the pilot project. These included:

- receiving funding seven months after the proposed start date of the pilot programme;
- problems with recruitment resulting in significant appointments being made more than a year after the pilot period;
- the loss of one out of three Crisis Carers from the scheme.

In the report provided by Bradford, the number of referrals given is for a seven month period when just seven young people were referred to the project. When comparing this figure to regional estimates for overnight runaways in West Yorkshire Metropolitan County of 3,700²³, there appears to be some discrepancy.

The report provided by Bradford fails to recognise that the provision of foster carers from Social Services will act as a barrier for some children and young people who, for whatever reason, are unwilling to access accommodation provided by the local authority. This is not taken into account in Bradford's claim that the emergency service should be absorbed into mainstream funding as:

"the number of referrals made to CRP does not justify a separate service to them alone."

The focus of the service upon children and young people who are not Social Service clients, to use the terminology of the report, at the time of referral poses the quandary of meeting the needs those children and young

²³ Figures from Still Running 2 Survey, The Children's Society.

people who are Social Service clients. For example, where would a young person running from a care placement and in need of emergency accommodation go? Effectively, if they were not willing to discuss their needs and issues with their social worker and/or accept the placement allocated to them by Social Services where there may be a problem, there is no service to meet their needs.

Bradford Community Refuge Project's process to capture learning provided no evidence for the comments and recommendations made in the report and does not provide evidenced-based learning about the interventions provided by the pilot project or outcomes for children and young people.

Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services' (DSCH) Runaways' Service

The Runaways Service consisted of a number of components that were already part of an existing provision for children and young people and their families including:

- emergency residential placement facility including a team of residential community support workers
- Emergency Duty Team (EDT) of out-of-hours generic social workers
- team of day-time Community Support Workers

In addition to the pre-existing components of The Runaways Service, a further two elements were included:

- a runaways freephone helpline
- preventative work carried out in schools by two Connexions Personal Advisors to promote the Runaways Service and to provide workshops in schools and other related activities

DSCH commissioned The Children's Society's Research Unit to carry out a review of the emergency accommodation at Orchard Lane and allocated a significant amount of resources for this process. DSCH stated a particular interest in a number of areas that relate to both the development process of establishing the accommodation project and service delivery.

In carrying out the review, a number of issues arose. Firstly, it was not possible to involve children and young people in the review and their views are not part of the review. Secondly, because the review was retrospective, The Research Unit were not able to establish a monitoring system to capture data and learning. The Research Unit were also denied direct access to DSCH's monitoring data and DSCH provided information from records they held which were not always complete or accurate. Whilst information collected by DSCH provided some useful information for the review and highlighted some key issues, no monitoring data was collected that provided follow-up information from children and young people that could provide information to assess the longer-term impact of the Runaways Service on children and young people's lives.

Analysis of the monitoring information captured by DSCH revealed that the majority of referrals made to the Runaways Service related to children and young people from the looked after population and that the majority of these referrals related to children and young people returning late to placement. As acknowledged in the review:

“This is a pattern which is also in evidence in many other areas. High levels of reporting of this kind has significant resource levels for the police and for agencies such as Runaways Service. It also raises the risk that children and young people from the looked after population who are genuinely at risk may be missed amongst the large numbers of children and young people who are failing to return to placements on time.”²⁴

The pilot model provided by DSCH is a positive example of how a service for young runaways can be integrated into statutory service provision for children and young people and benefit from being part of a wider service that, amongst other outcomes, can support children and young people to return home, thereby preventing entry into the care system. As the review makes clear:

“there are indications that with further development, experience and evaluation, it [the Runaways Service] may provide a valuable model of short-term emergency accommodation provision for runaways that could potentially be replicated in other areas.”²⁵

However, the review highlighted the need for DSCH to broaden its accessibility to children and young people in the area who run away from, stay away from or are forced to leave home. Recommendations to achieve widening the referral base included developing closer links with the voluntary sector and to promote self-referral by children and young people.

Whilst the preventative work and awareness-raising of the Runaways Service carried out in schools was clearly of a high standard and reached high numbers of children and young people, there is a clear link between running away and non-attendance at school and there is a need to develop further means to reach those children and young people who are not reached by the present. Since the review was carried out, DSCH have made some provision to work with those children and young people who are harder to reach.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safe 4 U Young Runaways' Project

Developed in partnership between Barnardos, Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils and Leicestershire Police, the Safe 4 U Young Runaways' project was established to meet three objectives:

- to operate an out-of-hours helpline for under sixteens who had run away from home (not care) and provide a crisis response, including advice mediation and, where appropriate accommodation (Runaway Helpline covered gaps when helpline not in operation)
- to develop an education pack to be distributed to young people at Key Stage 3 and 4 in all senior schools in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
- to produce publicity and training material to be disseminated across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to both young people and professionals

²⁴ Smeaton E and Medforth R (2005) *Review of Runaways Service Provided by Durham Social Care and Health Emergency and Family Support Services* London: The Children's Society.

²⁵ Ibid

The emergency accommodation element of the service was provided by local authority foster carers of whom two or three were available for young runaways every night. This emergency accommodation was accessed through EDT. Such an access route is problematic for some children and young people because of its association with Social Services/statutory provision and will act as a deterrent to accessing emergency accommodation.

There were a number of operational issues that they project faced including experiencing problems recruiting staff and being operational for only half of the pilot period.

There is acknowledgement that running away is a major issue in the area. However, there was a low level of take-up of service with only twenty-nine referrals. Some reasons for this are offered by project staff, however, it would be worth exploring this further as the project has potential to reach and impact positively on significant numbers of young runaways.

Once again, the lack of monitoring and evaluation systems resulted in a failure to capture evidence and learn from the pilot project.

Liverpool Young Runaways' Project

The grant from Choice Protects funded Liverpool Young Runaways' Project, provided by NCH. This aims of the project was to:

- offer alternatives to running away and works with children and young people and their families or to the care placement to ensure a prompt return, where possible and appropriate, using a solution focused approach;
- provide a website offering advice to parents and children and young people with links to Liverpool City Council and schools;
- provide links to National Runaways Helpline.

In addition to the above, "an element of the project team"²⁶ was available during evenings and weekends to ensure contact with children and young people placed in emergency accommodation. However, as no accommodation element was provided for young runaways, there is a lack of clarity about this element of the service.

From the data collected by Liverpool Runaways' Project, which appears to contain a number of inaccuracies, significant numbers of referrals made to the project relate to children and young people who have stayed out late from authority care without permission who have not run away.

Whilst considerable numbers of children and young people were referred to the project, the acknowledged lack of awareness-raising of the service provided by the project obviously impacted upon referrals from some sources. The majority of referrals (70%) came from police and related to children and young people reported as missing. Linking with the point made in the above paragraph, many of these referrals related to children and young people staying out without permission from care rather than to children and young people who have run away.

²⁶ This is taken from the project's report submitted to the DfES and it has been difficult to gain clarification.

Liverpool's contribution to capturing learning from the pilot project consists of a thirteen page report provided by a representative from the NCH project and from Children's Services, Liverpool City Council. This report presents basic monitoring information that is not extensive in what it captures and does not represent a systematic attempt to capture and present learning about the pilot project and its interventions with young runaways.

The London Refuge

As mentioned in the first part of the paper, the London Refuge has been in operation since 1995 and is not a pilot project.

The Association of London Government (ALG) commissioned, on behalf of stakeholders including DfES, the London Refuge and representatives of local authorities and voluntary sector service providers in London, Barnardos' Policy and Research Unit to evaluate strategic and service provision for young people who run away in London. The aim of this evaluation was to inform a consistent pan London response by focusing upon three objectives of which one was to evaluate the role of London Refuge and assess its contribution to a pan London strategy²⁷. Therefore the commissioned evaluation does not provide an evaluation of the service London Refuge provides for children and young people who enter refuge that examines what hinders and facilitates achieving positive outcomes for children or young people and what benefits children and young people receive as a result of the interventions provided by London Refuge.

The focus of the report appears to be upon external individuals and organisations awareness and perceptions of refuge. Whilst this is of significance, any 'rational' decision about the effectiveness of the refuge also would have to include the impacts for children and young people of the London Refuge as well as addressing possibilities of raising awareness of the refuge and what refuge can achieve amongst referral agencies, service commissioners and funders.

When offering a forward strategy and recommendations, the authors of the report recognise that the London Refuge provides an effective safety net valued by children and young people, parents, practitioners and service providers who work with children and young people who run away. The report also highlights the 'gateway' role that the London Refuge provides.

The report highlights a number of difficulties in providing a fixed refuge in London. For example, there are some challenging market implications relating to raising awareness of the London Refuge and encouraging its use, particularly by those Boroughs that are significantly distant from the Refuge and may question its validity for children and young people in their area. However, as noted by Harris and Scott, from evidence of the links between building relationships with an individual Borough and the levels of admissions of that Borough there is a suggestion that:

*"the link between concerted relationship building and increased admissions may be difficult to sustain consistently over a period of time a high turnover within referring agencies makes the task of raising awareness of the Refuge amongst practitioners a challenging one."*²⁸

²⁷ It is unclear whether or not this was an objective of the refuge during the time it has been operating as part of the DoH/DfES community-based refuge project.

²⁸ Harris J & Scott S (2006) *Missing in London: Meeting the Needs of Young People who Run Away* Barkinside: Barnardos.

The authors of the evaluation report suggest that the costs of a fixed refuge are significantly more than those of a flexible refuge and residential accommodation. This often made assumption is not necessarily correct and does not acknowledge the positive impact fixed refuge can have for children and young people. As noted by Rees:

“There may be less differences between the costs of the centralised and dispersed models than might be imagined.”²⁹

This assumption also place cost before the welfare of children and young people and ignores how refuge can prevent children and young people being in dangerous situations and resorting to risky survival strategies which can result in further costs to both the individual child and young person and to others, such as victims of crime, as well as to society who has to meet the costs of, for example, criminal justice, substance and mental health services.

South Coast Runaways' Initiative (SCRI) accommodation project

The accommodation project established in Torquay provides provision for one child or young person to stay for a maximum of four nights. Such a model was identified as appropriate to meet the level of need in the geographical area. A flexible staffing system was established. Whilst in the accommodation, the child or young person is provided with advice and support to address the circumstances and reasons they ran away. They are allocated a key worker who co-ordinates and takes a lead role in the child or young person's planning and provides other support such as advocacy and making referrals. Personal action plans are completed with children and young people whilst in refuge to meet their needs and to work towards identified outcomes. Case work is also undertaken that includes mediation with parents or carers to work towards reconciliation and explore the possibilities of a safe return home. Where this is not possible, work is undertaken to divert the child or young person to other suitable services or accommodation and staff support the child or young person to live elsewhere and maintain a positive relationship with their family.

SCRI commissioned The Children's Society's Research Unit to carry out a review of the process of establishing a flexible refuge. A systematic and thorough review was carried out which captured significant learning. However, after the report was completed and disseminated, it emerged that Checkpoint had not sought Section 51 certification and that the accommodation was not a flexible refuge. Despite this, the review contains important learning about refuge in general and identifies factors that both hinder and facilitate establishing a project of this kind. The learning from this review can be of wider use in promoting the development of community based emergency accommodation for young runaways. However, it does not provide an evaluation of the interventions set in place with children and young people and therefore cannot offer learning about the effectiveness of the pilot project itself.

Throughout the rest of this section of the report, the term 'flexible refuge' is used to describe the pilot accommodation project as this is the term used in the report identifying learning.

²⁹ Rees G (2001) *Working with Young Runaways: Learning from Practice* London: The Children's Society.

As a pilot project, the accommodation provided by SCRI at Checkpoint has many factors that have support the development of the pilot and also facilitate positive outcomes with operation of the accommodation project. These include the following:

- Checkpoint is an established provider of services for runaways in the area and has credibility with both children and young people and external agencies;
- the concept of flexible refuge is not a new one in Torquay and, for a number of years, there have been discussions at strategic level to establish a flexible refuge which had involved a number of external agencies;
- a number of protocols and policies had already been formulated prior to establishing the flexible refuge;
- all of the above has meant that there was a considerable degree of knowledge around flexible refuge which could be utilised for the bid to the DoH for monies from Choice Protects and to developing and running a flexible refuge;
- there has also been a consistency of key individuals at a strategic level who have been involved from the onset in initial discussions around flexible refuge and who have sustained positive interagency working.

A further strength of the project in Torquay is its ability to work with the child or young person once they have left the accommodation.

However, there has been very limited take-up of the accommodation in Torquay by children and young people. Whilst there is limited evidence to understand why this has been the case, it is likely that the following factors have played some part in under-use³⁰:

- Location of the accommodation in the same building of a project for runaways is likely to act as a deterrent to some children and young people to accessing the accommodation. As previously identified, children and young people have highlighted the importance of any refuge provision being in a secret location to ensure that young runaways seeking refuge feel safe³¹ and it is recognised that maintaining a secret location is difficult, and not possible when the accommodation is part of project for runaways. Children and young people have identified that locating any form of refuge accommodation as part of a project causes concern about safety and this may hinder children and young people's willingness to access the accommodation³².
- A lack of outreach work to access those children and young people who are likely to be in need of emergency accommodation.
- Because of existing demands upon project staff, and recognition that alongside running a busy day project, there are limited resources available for providing the accommodation project, it has been difficult for staff to allocate the time necessary to, for example, promote the accommodation project and work with external referral agencies.

³⁰ This was the situation at the end of 2007 but it is acknowledge that there may have been some change since this time; however it is important for this learning to be captured.

³¹ Smeaton and Rees (2004) *Running Away in South Yorkshire* London: The Children's Society.

³² Ibid

3. Concluding Comments and Recommendations

The concluding comments to this paper have been organised under four main themes with recommendations relating to each theme.

1. Acknowledging the complexities of refuge

Refuge is a complex model that provides for children and young people with a range of intricate issues in their lives. Refuge is also undeniably a resource intensive model where costs are not fixed but dependent upon a number of variables that shift. However, refuge can work effectively with children and young people who may have deep rooted issues in their lives that have either not been brought to the attention of services or that previous service intervention has not been able to address.

Recommendations

- i.) There should be explicit recognition that refuge, as a model of practice, operates in a distinct manner with some of the most vulnerable children and young people.

- ii.) Providers of refuge should work with referral agencies, CSCI and commissioning bodies to further understanding of the realities of refuge and what it can achieve for children and young people.

- ii.) Because of the complexities involved in developing and running a refuge, it is important to include professionals with appropriate expertise and skills.

- iv.) Any consideration of the costs involved in working with children and young people in refuge should consider the costs of failing to respond to these children and young people and the costs incurred of placing alternative interventions that are not designed to meet both immediate and longer-term needs.

2. Practice issues

The accommodation projects established as part of the DoH/DfES community-based refuge pilot and the refuges in Glasgow and South Yorkshire are all relatively new services and require time to develop their reputation. Previously established refuges have found that word-of-mouth recommendations amongst young people provide an important source of self-referral in the longer-term to raise awareness and credibility amongst young people. As word of mouth amongst children and young people is the most effective referral source, refuge projects need time to become established.

Experience has shown that when providers of refuge and other accommodation projects are able to continue working with a child or young person after leaving refuge through, for example, community-based/outreach work with professionals that the child or young person has developed a relationship, there is more scope to successfully address the child or young person's issues and needs.

Recommendations

i.) Any attempts to assess the rationale for continuing to provide refuge should take into consideration the length of time it takes for a refuge to become established.

ii.) Refuge providers should acknowledge and work to ensure the almost continual process required to ensure professionals in referral organisations are informed of refuge.

iii.) As far as possible, there is merit in embedding refuge processes and practices in structures and policies to avoid reliance upon professionals remaining in post.

iv.) Refuge providers should develop creative and effective means of informing children and young people of refuge provision and ensure reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people.

v.) Refuge providers should ensure provision to continue to work with the child or young person once they have left refuge.

3. Commissioning processes

The DoH initial commissioning process for the pilot community-based refuge programme was problematic as the six projects commissioned did not meet the basic criteria of being a pilot community-based refuge:

- Only one project, The London Refuge, has been through the process of registering and gaining status as a refuge under Section 51 of the 1989 Children's Act. However, this refuge is not a pilot project as it has been operating since 1995.
- The other five projects did not apply for refuge status and offered accommodation under Section 17 or Section 20.
- Three of the projects who were successful with their bid used funding from Choice Protects to build upon existing service provision.
- One of the six projects did not provide an accommodation element to its service provision.

Recommendation

i.) When commissioning services, alongside ensuring that tender proposals meet the scope of the tender, a number of factors should be considered and tendering projects should offer evidence of, for example: meeting local need, access to competent skills and expertise; delivery, accountability and reviewing processes; meeting the needs of children and young people; and including children and young people in gathering evidence of 'what works'³³.

³³ Whilst the recommendation about factors to consider in the tendering process extends to commissioners beyond central government it is acknowledged that, since the DoH's commissioning process for the pilot community-based refuge, government's corporate response to commissioning has worked to address the points made in this recommendation.

4. Capturing learning about refuge

Whilst there have been limited attempts to capture learning about refuge, there has, thus far, been little attempt to capture the views of those children and young people who have accessed refuge. Whilst projects may benefit from asking children and young people who have accessed their service to complete 'evaluation' forms, this process does not provide the rigor required to capture what works with children and young people and identify learning about refuge.

Unfortunately no overarching evaluation was commissioned by the DoH to capture learning of the six pilot projects. As a consequence, no consistent approach was taken to capture learning and the providers of the six pilot projects took individual and diverse approaches to capture learning about the service they provided. For example:

- only three projects commissioned professionals with expertise in evaluation and capturing learning to review the project;
- three of the projects did not commission any evaluation or review and provided very limited information themselves;
- there were significant differences in the amount of resources allocated to capture learning;
- where external review was commissioned of the pilot project, commissioners of the review chose the focus of the learning to be captured;
- the perspectives of children and young people have not been included in any meaningful manner;
- none of the six pilot projects measured impacts or outcomes for children and young people and impacts or outcomes for children and young people does not appear to have been a consideration when assessing the 'effectiveness' of the pilot projects.

The failure to implement an overarching evaluation of the pilot programme of community-based refuge has resulted in the loss of important learning. Therefore there is no 'effective rationale' to assess the pilot programme of community-based refuge. There is also limited evidence from the pilot programme to direct future development of refuge.

Recommendations

i.) Any such pilot programme should include an evaluation element that is consistent across pilot projects.

ii.) whilst future evaluations of refuge aim to include children and young people who have used refuge³⁴, it is essential that the views of children and young people who access the refuge projects are included in the evaluation process so that learning is captured about what works for children and young people and an assessment can be made of counterbalancing the costs of refuge, or any other accommodation projects, with longer-term outcomes for children and young people.

iii.) Future evaluations of refuge should generate useful learning about managing costs and ensuring an effective service is maintained to children and young people.

³⁴ Railway Children are carrying out evaluations of Safe at Last's refuge in South Yorkshire and ROC's refuge in Glasgow. The methodology for both these evaluations focuses upon a case study approach of a number of children and young people who have stayed in refuge including analysis of monitoring data, interviews with children and young people and with parents and carers, where appropriate. The ROC refuge evaluation also includes a longitudinal element to assess the longer-term impact of refuge

The Future of Refuge

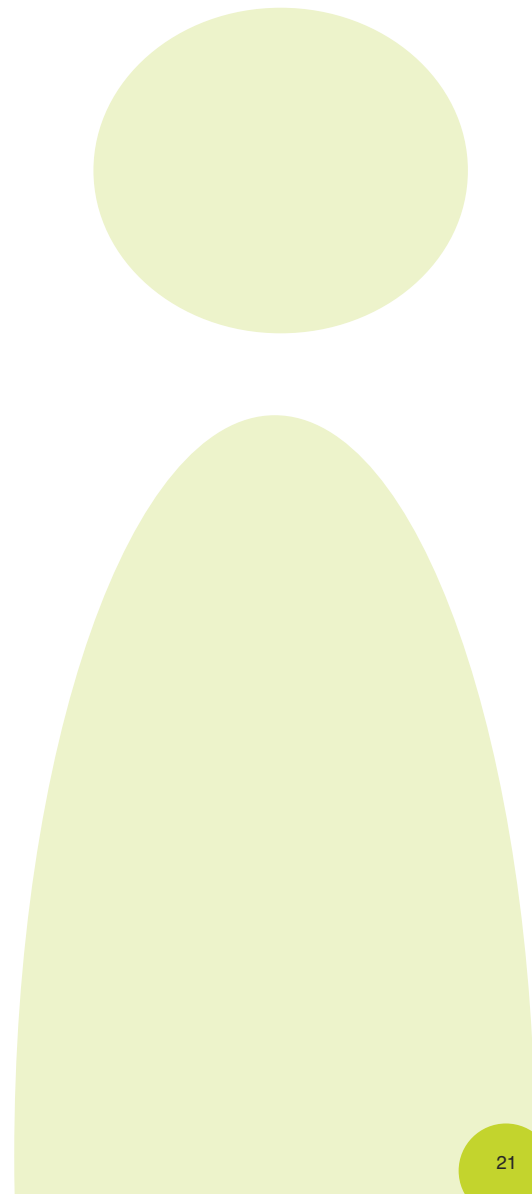
At present, the future of refuge is ambiguous. Refuge providers, whilst carrying out important work with vulnerable and marginalised children and young people, face constant uncertainty about their existence beyond the short-term because of the lack of funding sources. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has recently established a working group to consider emergency accommodation, including refuge which is presently in its infancy. There are both advantages and disadvantages of making refuges accessible to other groups of vulnerable children and young people, such as those involved in sexual exploitation and trafficking. There are also clear indications that some children and young who are away from home or care are not comfortable with the structured approach of refuge and will not access refuge accommodation whilst being at risk and in need.

There is clear evidence that refuge works. However there is also the need:

- to evidence further what refuge can contribute;
- for additional work to dispel some of the inaccuracies about refuge;
- to develop innovative responses to those elements of refuge that remain problematic.

Only once the above has been achieved will it be possible to make informed decisions about the future direction of refuge in the UK.

Notes





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