

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN'S WELFARE

Child Protection in Residential Care

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP
HOSTED BY THE MICHAEL SIEFF FOUNDATION HELD
AT THE DUKE OF YORK'S HQ, LONDON FEBRUARY
1993



Sponsored by The Michael Sieff Foundation
Report of Workshop following Conference No.7, by Iain Lynch

Aims and Participants

The workshop was held to bring together managers of residential children's homes and others concerned with the protection of children. It followed the multi-disciplinary conference held in September 1992 at Cumberland Lodge that considered the problems of residential care in the light of considerable public concern about the welfare and protection of children.

The workshop was addressed by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, **Timothy Yeo MP**, the General Secretary of the Social Care Association, **Dick Clough** MBE, and a panel which included **Norman Warner**, Chairman of the National Inquiry into the Staffing and Management of Children's Homes; **John Parker**, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Health; **Herbert Laming** CBE, Chief Inspector of the Social Services Inspectorate; **Roger Singleton**, Senior Director of Barnado's; and **Peter Smallridge**, President of the Association of Directors of Social Services.

Workshop discussion

The participants split into working groups for much of the workshop to discuss in detail the issues facing residential child care and frame a number of questions for comment by the panel of experts.

The points raised are distilled below according to each issue, with the comments from the panel separately identified.

Training

Concern was expressed about the generic training given to social workers. It was felt overall that the model followed over the past twenty years had not been successful for residential care and that there should be a new look at qualifying training from scratch.

Specific skills were needed for residential care staff and it was suggested that there should be:-

- proper induction courses for residential staff
- the re-introduction of trainee schemes
- training units to provide basic training, staff development programmes, support, and career progression for residential staff
- separate training budgets for each establishment.

The best social workers tended to be those who had substantial residential work experience.

The panel agreed that there was a strong case for looking again at training issues. In 1975 the Bains Committee Report on manpower and training in social services found 1435 trained people working in residential care. The Warner Committee found just 1400. It was both surprising and disappointing that the numbers were as low as this and underlined the need for another look at this issue.

Training issues must be addressed if quality is to be improved

In *Choosing with Care* the Warner Committee set out the arguments which had been developed to make training more relevant. The Department of Health has received some alternative views opposing a change from the present training arrangements and was awaiting further response to its consultation on the subject.

Quality and training were closely linked and training issues must be addressed if the quality of the service is to be improved.

Resources

The recent debate on maintaining control and discipline had largely ignored the circumstances in children's homes. Heads of homes feel confident, able and properly equipped if they are working in properly resourced establishments each of which has been given a clear indication of its task and priorities.

The lack of proper support by health authorities was also posing problems as social services departments were increasingly having to fund psychiatrists and psychologists. Very little seems to be done for disturbed and mentally ill young people and a new definition of the responsibilities of the NHS in this area would be welcome.

The question posed was how can the question of resources be put on the agenda with the Government? The panel commented that the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) talks to Ministers on a regular basis. 81 % of Directors of Social Services are saying that they will not be able to implement Govern-

ment policies if resources are further reduced. There has been much discussion between the ADSS and the Government to get a combined approach and agreed strategy on how homes are to be appropriately resourced.

Education of children in care

A recurring theme during the workshop was the lack of a relationship between Social Services and Education at both national and local levels. Why does the Department of Education not take responsibility for children in homes and what responsibility do social services have for children who have been excluded from schools?

The increase in the number of locally managed schools and grant maintained schools who are concerned about rankings and survival brings a real risk that the children who represent some of the biggest challenges are not going to get opportunities in local schools.

Children who represent some of the biggest challenges may not get opportunities in local schools

The panel confirmed that a number of Inquiry reports have drawn attention to the gap of educating children in care. The Joint Utting Implementation Group which has a representative from the Department for Education is monitoring the number of exclusions from schools. Society has a duty to equip children and provide them with an appropriate education.

The duty of a local authority is clear. It has a responsibility to provide an education for a child even if a headmaster has excluded him/her. If it does not have sufficient resources it must consider its priorities to ensure that it is giving the right priority to this section of society.

Control and discipline

One area which had led to a reduction of confidence related to questions of control and restraint. Providing adequate control and discipline is within the competence of skilled and experienced residential staff but they need clear and properly defined objectives backed up by adequate staffing and continuity of staff. It is important for young people with conduct disorders to have someone who knows them and to whom they can relate.

The Department of Health is to issue new guidelines on control and restraint to embody the spirit of the

Children Act. This will recognise the difficulties of operating the guidelines on a daily basis.

Developing plans for children

There appeared to be a lack of co-ordination nationally for the provision of appropriate services for children and there was concern that the demise of Peper Harow would be repeated and further skills lost if there wasn't a national plan for children's services.

There was need for local authorities to include in their care plans those children looked after who were out of school.

The Panel underlined the need for local authorities to develop their own service plans for children. The Department of Health can direct local authorities and require a response but the local authorities are responsible for making placements. Their service plans must take account of all resources in the voluntary and private sector including specialist services available in therapeutic communities.

The voluntary sector's contribution to residential care has been reducing over the years. Directors of Social Services have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo by which they only pay for places used, but the voluntary sector homes need a commitment if resources are to be invested. The voluntary sector must ask whether it is right for their hard earned public donations to subsidise good practice if there is limited commitment from the users of the service.

Managers of homes should lobby the ADSS, the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to get them to formulate a national policy and strategy.

Leadership, managerial vision and responsibility must be underpinned by a philosophy of care

Whatever regime is developed must be underpinned by a philosophy of care. Successful establishments are those built upon leadership, managerial vision and responsibility. There are different models which can be successful but they all need the right atmosphere, high standards and an open and communicative environment.

Balancing the rights of children and staff

There are widespread anxieties about touch and handling children in residential care felt by good caring workers. The components of good quality residential care - touch, being in touch with children, appropri-

ate physical control and good communication with children are being lost. What signs are there that they can be regained?

The panel felt there was an onus on local authorities to give clear guidance on how these issues should be handled. There needs to be equal fairness on all sides. Authorities must adopt child protection procedures but must not over-react. If a member of staff is suspended because of an allegation of abuse they must still receive support from the local authority during the investigation. Disciplinary procedures should run at the same time as the child protection investigation to minimise the time scale and stress involved.

Rights must be enforced and not abused

Children's rights had come to the fore because they had been abused over the years. If rights are to be upheld they must be enforced and not abused. This applies to both children's and staff rights.

Things do go wrong from time to time. It is important that everyone in a home discusses and is aware of clear rational and sensible procedures which will be followed to resolve conflict. Families experience strains and stresses and it is not surprising that homes do too. Staff and children need to be aware of their role in ensuring the success of a home. Involving children in decision making is time consuming but improves both morale and behaviour.

Restoring confidence and commitment in residential care

The fact that many residential workers were now working in a climate of fear had led to a lowering of confidence and morale. Residential workers felt they had lost the support of their managers and there was need to restore faith, confidence, dedication and commitment. For this to be achieved managers outside homes need to know how they can provide effective support and supervision.

A climate of fear lowers confidence and morale

Directors of Social Services need to offer assistance and engage staff in the homes in the development of strategies and policies and not just hand them down. Staff need to be helped to feel more valued.

Off-site managers should make themselves available and visit homes to discuss the good and bad points of

working in the home with staff. This should help reduce feelings of isolation and help build the partnership essential for the effective management of the service. Line managers need to carry credibility and be able to argue the case for residential care.

The use of agency staff had caused numerous problems and meant that the work of permanent staff was undone. It was also felt that field social workers seemed to manage to avoid the spotlight yet their failings contributed to the difficulties experienced in residential homes.

The role of elected members in promoting good practice

Elected members have an important role in developing strategies and policy; in establishing children's service plans and ensuring that satisfactory systems for appraisal and supervision are in place. They must address the need for clear statements of purpose of homes in their ownership but they must avoid taking an active role in carrying out policy and recruiting and appointing staff. These issues are the responsibility of the Directors of Social Services and the heads of homes.

Elected members have an important strategic - rather than executive - role

Members must address the corporate resource issues involved and be aware of the wider responsibilities they have for the upbringing of children in their care in relation to education and leisure provision as well as social services. They also have a role in taking an active interest in visiting homes to represent the interests of their constituents.

The local authority associations are preparing a guidance note for elected members on their role and this is welcomed.

Improving management structures and performance

Residential social work is a complex business but staff have too often limited management training on the periphery of social services management. Conversely a residential worker may be responsible for five or six staff and a building worth £1/4million but have no responsibility for admissions to the building. There are often too many functions within a single home and a grouping of children with disparate needs which are difficult for the normal skill base of a home. Spare

capacity needs to be built into the system to ensure that children are not placed in inappropriate homes.

Concern was expressed that there were insufficient management development opportunities. In addition career structures for residential staff were stunted. There needed to be parity between residential and field social workers particularly in the area of pay and conditions. If conditions did not improve the quality and image of the service would not improve.

Spare capacity is needed to avoid inappropriate placements

Children looked after by social services departments needed the support of an entire team and gatherings such as this workshop could only assist in breaking down professional barriers.

A further management problem was the difficulty of dismissing staff who were not performing. In a time of recession this was more difficult as 'deadwood' tended to stay put.

The panel commented that the Local Government Management Board was about to produce a qualification aimed at managers close to the management of individual care units *entitled Management of Care*. In the near future it is likely that there will be a move away from the tiers of line managers with the separation of purchasers and providers. Managers will then have greater responsibility and accountability for their own business units and budgets.

There still need to be changes in the way staff are paid with a move away from pay related to the number of beds in an establishment to a system based on paying staff what they are worth for doing a challenging and skilled job. This may be based on team performance rather than individual performance but would be an important element in career progression and improved management.