



Briefing for:	Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee
Title:	Isolation Report
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1. Introduction

Leaving care can be a very difficult period for young people, particularly when they do not have established support networks in place. The kinds of issues that can impact on the isolation experienced by young people are extensive. Poor family relationships, limited friendship networks are two of the primary factors which can leave people feeling alone and isolated.

There is clear evidence of the importance for young people having experienced positive attachments with care givers, at some stage prior to their becoming an adult.

Those who are at greater advantage in terms of leaving care will be young people who have experienced long term stability in their last placements. Research tells us that these are more likely to be fostering or kinship placements.

Ongoing access to education and training is of crucial importance. There is clear evidence that a significant number of young people who do not achieve well in their GCSE's are unlikely to be in education or employment by the age of 18. Those who fare better, are again the young people who have benefited from having consistency in their care. This is even more so when the young

person is able to obtain some degree of ongoing support from that care giver. For example, being able to visit for Sunday dinner, affording an opportunity to update people who care on what's been happening in their life can be a simple but significantly beneficial experience. By its very nature, involvement in further education or training, not only supports aspirations, increases feelings of self worth but it also gives access to potential friendships, all of which mitigate against a sense of isolation.

We have seen a number of examples of young people within the care system forming healthy positive relationships with their peers and their shared understanding of the experience of being in care, can be of benefit. However, these relationships can also have the potential for being problematic depending on whether these influences are less than healthy as a consequence of the experience of each friend. Substances and alcohol are frequently used by young people as a means of escapism from their emotional disharmony. Both can have depressant qualities and are likely to increase people's feelings of insecurity and isolation.

Whilst the above is not an exhaustive list of the factors that can contribute to a young person experiencing feelings of isolation, which leave them struggling with independent living, it does not have to be all doom and gloom. Early identification of any of these issues and providing appropriate responses/service provision can make a significant difference.

All our arrangements need to take account of the likely ambivalence of young people and their wish to try to survive on their own and their unwillingness at times to accept that they might need support. We have found that where young people resist support initially, they usually return at a later stage and arrangements are in place for young people to receive support and assistance. The opportunities detailed below are open to all our young people bearing in mind all can be affected by issues of isolation and emotional need.

2. Background statistics

16-18 year olds in semi-independent provision -65

22 are placed in borough; many who are not placed in Haringey are still local to the borough.

All these young people receive some level of key work support, as detailed in the section below.

18+ young people who we support total 337

45 continue to receive additional formal key work support

Snap shot at the 19th birthday indicates 68.6% (year-to-date) are in ETE

3. Support to care leavers

In general our care leavers receive direct support from their social workers, personal advisors and key workers (attached to their housing provision), in addition to the usual multi-agency provision. (eg GP, college, Youth Offending Service). The pathway plan is the main document used to capture a holistic

picture of young people's needs and support as they become young adults. Isolation and support needs will be addressed within this context. New care planning regulations, which have just come into force this month, require the pathway plan to be reviewed after each time a young person moves.

4. Accommodation providers and choice

We have 6 contracted semi independent providers who we use on a regular basis for young people aged 16-18. Our contract includes comprehensive requirements in terms of the standards required for our young people including the quality of accommodation and level of support required for young people in the preparation for independence. As young people journey through the system to 18+ the same providers are used where at all possible to ensure continued standards of care and support are in place. Additionally young people, where formalised support cannot continue, can be referred to voluntary key work support agencies depending on need and their co-operation.

Out of hours provision is mainly provided via these accommodations, and each young person receives a package of care that is tailored to their needs. There are three levels of support a young person can receive, these hours of support are tailored around the young person's routine and needs and therefore key work sessions may take place in evenings. It is also known for the service where there are particular concerns about a young person to put in place support over the weekends and specifically out of hours whether that be a telephone call or actual visit. All young people have emergency out of hours contact details for the LA and provider with whom they are attached.

Careful consideration is given to every young person being placed and where and which provider can best meet their needs. In terms of unaccompanied minors there has been a concerted effort to place new arrivals with young people from similar culture and background and where at all possible same language. This has greatly enhanced these young people's ability to settle and adjust to life in the UK and begin to manage their feelings of loss, trauma and isolation. With regard to mainstream children who are LAC possible placements with older siblings are considered and matching takes place to place less chaotic young people together.

Some of our providers provide life skills workshops and certificates to young people to promote their life skills. This has been useful in empowering and giving confidence to such young people. This also increases opportunities for young people to mix and build relationships.

As part of the upcoming accommodation tender Haringey is working in partnership with five other local authorities (Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest). This collaboration is intended to ensure a higher quality of care for our young people, to increase choice, but also help to further address issues of isolation particularly in relation to out of hours support.

It is important to note that particularly vulnerable and higher risk young people are placed in 24 hour care so that their needs can be continuously monitored and issues of risk addressed, this however becomes more difficult to address as they become older and supported accommodation options decrease. It is therefore important to keep this in mind with more creative options.

5. Opportunities to Make Connections:

5.1 Participation

The work to bring young people in care together begins via the Haringey virtual school. The work started here links with the work in participation.

Participation projects in the service provide a shared experience and develop peer support. Relationships are sometimes created which are maintained outside of the meetings. This opportunity for young people to meet in these circumstances can be very positive to those who feel isolated but would not necessarily disclose this to us.

Some of the projects we currently have within the service include. Total Respect Training, the semi-independent supported housing tender group, Reg.33 children's homes Inspection, meetings with the Director of CYPS and involvement with the Children in Care Council.

Many of the planning workshops for the projects highlighted above take place out of hours with staff and young people working together.

Further work planned includes developing a peer mentoring scheme for care leavers to mentor children and younger people in care. In line with this we are currently researching the idea of a similar project called the Housing Buddies scheme. Young people who have moved on and successfully sustained a tenancy will be asked if they would like training on how to support another young person just moving into their own permanent accommodation and this support can be provided out of hours. Action for Children have shown interest in assisting us to train the young people and we have already commenced discussions with the colleagues in housing services.

5.2 Young Parents

The service focuses on services for young mothers to reduce their sense of isolation as research confirms these young women are at higher risk of feeling socially and emotionally isolated.

Young parents meet as a group at Triangle Children's Centre. This is a great opportunity for them to get together and is an excellent community resource. Young parents have the opportunity to meet other young people in similar situations as themselves and have then gone on to establish informal peer support groups of their own. This means that they have some much valued support from each other during evenings and weekends when a lot of young

parents leaving care can feel isolated. Some of these young people are also keen to become peer mentors as mentioned above.

Connexions have a monthly event for young parents living in the borough which is an opportunity to address issues of education, training and employment in addition to develop friendships.

5.3 University Students

The service has a dedicated worker for young people at university. This has assisted in ensuring the service has knowledge of various universities' support networks such as student unions and counselling services, financial support i.e. hardship funds.

Our students are encouraged to participate in student forums and other activities that are available at their university. Part-time work also provides opportunities to develop contacts and possible friendships. A number of our young people at university return to live with their foster carers during the holiday periods which assists them in maintaining positive family links. Some of those at university do not wish for us to make direct contact with their universities due to possible stigma, this can sometimes make ensuring adequate support is in place more difficult. Where there is communication around their wellbeing and care, young people are able to make good use of continued multi-agency professional support.

5.4 Internal Events and work with External agencies

The service holds a number of events annually including an end of season party (Christmas event), Educational and Achievement Celebration day and EID party.

These events are important at bringing our young people together and giving them opportunities to attend other events external to the service together. We have also encouraged young people to get involved in planning these events, designing invitations and posters, and providing a service at the event such as face painting or DJ.

We have also undertaken targeted events specific to address acknowledged needs such as the 4YP sexual health group event that worked with some of our Afghan young men, providing an opportunity for young men who speak the same language to meet new people from their country. Similar workshops are planned for later this year, including targeting young people who need to develop skills in holding their own tenancy and budgeting.

We work closely with external projects that encourage young people to meet up with other young people from different boroughs and might not necessarily be in care. Some of these projects include:

'Who Cares Trust'

One of the Projects with the 'Who Cares Trust' gave our young people the opportunity to get involved in a photograph exhibition. This was an exhibition of photographs taken by a number of Haringey's care leavers about their experiences of life in LA care. Whilst developing new skills our young people also made friends with other young people from all around London.

The project E18HTEEN will specifically bring care leavers together to support their engagement in sports, education and employment.

Aim Higher events at university, where young visitors take part in a range of activities, have a tour of the university and meet students who are currently doing degrees.

The Service also attends various external events and opportunities for young people, for example voluntary organisations have arranged theatre events for young people in care. These events have been well attended by young people, accompanied out of hours by staff, which has also resulted in opportunities for young people to connect.

6. Additional Considerations:

6.1 Therapeutic intervention including work with substance misuse

Young people are also referred to health and voluntary services for therapeutic support to help them with their emotional well being and to help them gain insight into the reasons for their isolation and help build confidence and self esteem. Once they are helped with building self esteem and confidence they are also helped with their depression and gain social skills which help them in their engagement socially, become more active, outgoing and with increased energy are able to engage with activities. Through this young people are able to build on skills, improve relationships, gain social skills, become more active and thus enjoy healthier relationship/friendships.

The fragile mental health of many of our young people presents ongoing concerns. For those under 18 and living reasonably locally there is access to the Tavistock Haringey Service. For those who are 18+ there are real challenges in accessing appropriate support through adult mental health provision. There have already been discussions with Adults, Culture and Community Services Services and there will be further discussions with providers in the health service. The ultimate aim is to make progress with far more immediate support for vulnerable young people in urgent need of specific mental health services.

6.2 Family relationships and networks of support

At the point of leaving care a need to renew or repair relationships with family members, including extended family remains at the forefront of young people's minds. This is often observed at the point of transition to the 18+ service and again at the current exit period (age 21) for the service. The service recognises that even if relationships with parents have irretrievably broken down, other members of a young person's extended family may be able to offer some support.

This is an extremely challenging aspect of the work as it is also known that professional support from the multi-agency and substitute carers tends to decline once the young person has ceased to be looked after. This increases the risk of heightened issues of isolation at this time of transition and therefore the service is looking at ways to strengthen this area of work, via supervision, care planning, pathway plans and raise awareness with the appropriate professionals. All social workers and personal advisors are beginning to work more effectively with family members, paying particular attention to this aspect in the pathway plan and looking for ways to support appropriate contact and include relatives, where possible, in care planning.

6.3 Promotion of Leisure Interests

The service encourages young people to participate in leisure activities and hobbies. Such interests are highlighted and recorded in young people's pathway plans and ways to address need recorded. This is an additional opportunity to address isolation and encourage and promote opportunities to make friendships and develop interest and self esteem.

7. Conclusions

The leaving care planning process is the arena in which arrangements for continuing support, contact and prevention of isolation can best be met and continued to be developed. Positive planning, involving all of the potential supports that are available to young people, formal and informal, identifies the areas in which young people are most likely to need support and make clear arrangements as to who will meet those needs. Continuing links are likely to be enhanced where account is taken of young people's own perceptions of need and where they have choice about who they will receive support from.

A key objective for this financial year is to ensure all our young people have access to a series of life skill workshops (led by CiC staff members) and planning for these has now commenced. Sessions will include, for example, budgeting, housing issues, cooking and health in relation to being an independent young adult. Reviewing of independence skills will be far more robust with greater focus on these in reviews and planning. The overall aim is to achieve an individually responsive service which will strengthen the service provision and ultimately give all young people a far stronger foundation for starting out in adult life as care leavers.