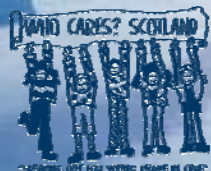


'In-secure'

The views & experiences of young people in
secure accommodation in Scotland



Produced by:
Better Outcomes for
Secure Services Project



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I would like to thank all of the young people who participated and the secure staff who supported them.

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Section 1

- Context & Background
- Aims & Objectives
- Methodology



Context and Background

In March 2003 Who Cares? Scotland received funding from the Scottish Executive Intensive Support Fund for a 3-year project, which would offer a service to achieve better outcomes for young people in secure accommodation. Our aim was to formally consult with young people on their experiences of being in secure accommodation. In order to achieve this aim we used various forms of consultation to gather accurate information and to feedback to service providers and the Scottish Executive on young peoples views of services and programmes.

The reconfiguration of the secure estate in Scotland has been seen as a priority within the Scottish Government. In March 2003 the Scottish Executive announced that it would increase the total number of secure places to 125. The Executive introduced a 10-point Action Plan to reduce youth crime. A working group was set up to develop a strategic framework of national objectives and standards for Scotland's Youth Justice services, to help achieve the national target of reducing the number of persistent offenders by 10% by 2006. (1)

Given that there is both a societal and political demand for this type of intervention for children we feel that this report is vital in allowing policy makers and service providers the opportunity to hear the views of service users on how this type of care is best provided rather than whether or not it should be.

There were 258 admissions to secure accommodation in 2002-03. Three quarters were boys; two thirds were through children's hearings and one third through courts; a quarter came from their parental home, a quarter from residential schools and a fifth from children's homes. Average age was 14 years and four months. Older teenagers tended to come from other secure care or young offender's institutions and usually do so through courts. Younger children tended to come from foster care or children's homes and do so through children's hearings. (2)

In 2002-03 over a fifth of admissions were young people who in recent years had previous experience in secure care – similar to previous years. The gap between spells of secure care has steadily increased, from under 2 months in 1995-96 to 5 months in 2002-03. This information combined with the increasing length of stay suggests secure providers are retaining children that they suspect will return quickly. (2)

Young people in secure care are likely to have had disrupted and disturbed experiences of family life, and many have been subject to various forms of abuse. For a large number of these young people this resulted in episodes in various care placements from which many ran away and broke all links with any form of a stable home life. A significant number have had difficulties in school, which result in truancy or exclusion. A high number have experimented with various forms of drugs and alcohol. The incidence of mental health problems amongst these young people is significant both before and during their time in secure care. The past of these young people makes for salutary reading in reminding us of our responsibility that we have to improve their future. (3)

Whilst a number of studies have looked at the routes that bring young people into secure care and looked at the needs, and behaviour, of young people whilst they are there, little research has started from looking at the narratives of the young people themselves. From the discussions with the young people, insights emerged with clear implications for policy and practice.

Aims and objectives

The key aims of the consultation were:

- *To gain an overview of what the deprivation of liberty means to young people in secure accommodation*
- *To ensure that the views and experiences of young people within secure accommodation are represented and that young people are made aware of their rights and responsibilities*
- *To provide an equitable and inclusive approach to consultation with children and young people that will ensure that all children and young people in secure accommodation have the opportunity to be involved*
- *To provide a foundation for future consultations into one or more of the issues raised by young people*
- *To ensure that policy-makers hear young people in secure care's voices*

Methodology & Participation

The methodology of the consultation process involved a multi-layered approach:

- One to One Interviews x 4
- Focus Groups x 4
- Informal Interviews
- Two Week Diaries x 15

Focus Groups were selected as one of the most appropriate methodologies for this consultation. Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them. As such, they use guided group discussions to generate a rich understanding of participant's experiences and beliefs. They enabled the gathering of information from a group of people through group discussion.

By creating opportunities for group members to question and explain things to each other, the focus group process allows insight into the construction of meanings between participants. In addition, it is thought that focus groups facilitate rather than inhibit openness.

Facilitators need to be mindful of these issues and work to mitigate them, without putting the young people under pressure. Though the nature of focus group methodology means that participants take the discussion in directions they want to develop, a number of topics and suggested questions were identified in advance.

The Secure Units

Focus groups took place in four secure units that accommodate young people in Scotland. They were Rossie Secure Accommodation Services, St Mary's, Kerelaw, and St Catherine's. Within each establishment young people were invited to be part of the focus groups and were briefed about the nature and purpose of the group. Young people were asked to sign consent forms. Young people in Howden Hall were given the opportunity to participate but declined. The Elms was closed at the time of the consultation due to refurbishment.

The Young People

Fourteen young people took part in four groups. Of these, six were female. The groups consisted of both young people placed by Children's Hearings and those on remand and sentence. To our own knowledge none of the young people who took part were representative of ethnic minority groups. As far as we are aware no young people with a disability participated. All young people involved in the consultation were between 14 and 16 years old.

The Focus Groups

The four groups took place between February and April 2004. Two or three members of the Better Outcomes for Secure Services (B.O.S.S. Project) facilitated each focus group.

This enabled us to monitor the direction of the discussion and to ensure all topics were covered. Groups were held within each establishment either in the sitting areas of the units or within the education department. No staff from the establishments were present when the groups took place.

At the beginning of each group the facilitators confirmed where they were from and explained the aims of the session. The young people were assured that their contributions to the discussions would remain anonymous. After gaining the consent of group participants, all of the focus groups were tape recorded and later transcribed.

The focus group started with an icebreaker, which encouraged the groups to relax, have fun and improve communication. The groups were then asked to take part in the exercise 'match what you miss' which consisted of recording nine things they missed while they were in secure care. The groups were then asked five questions:

1. *How do you feel about the decision to come into secure care? Do you think there was an alternative?*
2. *How do you think your placement in secure care is benefiting you?*
3. *Can you tell me about your admission to the secure unit?*
4. *Was it easy to settle in and make friends, and build relationships with staff? What would have helped you to make this easier?*
5. *Are you aware of your rights when in secure and have you used them?*

Young people were then offered the opportunity to complete a coat of arms outlining their hopes, regrets, dreams and aspirations for the future.

The groups were then asked to discuss the remaining five questions:

6. *Do you have contact with family and friends? How often and what would make it better?*
7. *What works in a secure unit for young people?*
8. *What is life like in secure care?*
9. *What is your plan when you move out of the secure unit?*
10. *If you could give a young person admitted to secure advice, what would it be?*

At the end of the session the young people played a game of bingo using their answers from the 'match what you miss exercise' which was conducted at the start of the consultation. Each group ran for approximately one and a half hours. All the young people worked extremely hard during the session to put across their ideas and concerns clearly. They maintained a high level of concentration and listened with respect to one another. Young people appreciated having the opportunity to express their views and to put their ideas across.

The Diaries

Young people were offered the opportunity to write a two-week diary about what life is like in secure care. They were given the following guidance:

Thank you for agreeing to write a diary about what your life is like in secure accommodation. Don't worry about spelling or your writing, as it is what you write about that is important rather than how you've written it. If you get stuck for things to write you could tell me about, your admission into the unit, family and friends, school, best or worst part of the day, food, staff, home, thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, regrets, reviews, hearings, court, what you miss, laughing, crying, problems and achievements.

One to One Interviews

Four young people took part in one to one interviews. These were held in the secure establishments and tape recorded then scribed. The young people were asked the same ten questions as the focus groups. The advantages of this methodology in a secure setting are that some young people could find it difficult to talk about personal issues in a randomly selected group and some might 'censor' their contributions to avoid repercussions later. In this context, peer influence may have acted to inhibit discussion about positive aspects of life in secure accommodation.

Informal Interviews

Young people were also given the opportunity to discuss any aspect of life in secure care with the members of the project during their visits to the units.

Section 2

- The views of young people
- Key themes identified by young people



The Views of Young People

Deprivation of Liberty

The young people were asked how they felt about the decision to come into secure care and did they believe there was an alternative. The majority of the young people agreed with the decision.

"Yeh to keep me safe"

"It was a good thing but it took away my freedom, friends, family"

However, some felt that the system had failed them and that if other resources were available or supports were put in place they may not have ended up in secure accommodation.

"Open units are out of control"

"No, they tried everything else with me but feel my social worker was sh--- and didn't support me enough"

"They should of given me help before and I wouldn't now be here"

The young people were very open regarding the benefits of secure care and some recognised that it was the only alternative for either their safety or the safety of others.

"It stopped me taking drugs"

"Think it was the right decision cos I made a mess of someone's life"

"It was the right decision for me to come into secure care as I was putting others lives at risk"

When asked how do you think your placement in secure care in benefiting you? The consensus of opinion from young people was that there were benefits.

"It has been beneficial to me due to the programmes of intervention, cognitive skills, and violence reduction. It's gave me to time to reflect on my behaviour"

"Staff helped me, I've calmed down a lot"

There was particular emphasis regarding the benefits of not being able to take drugs.

"It has helped me as I have been unable to take drugs while in secure care"

"Benefited me a wee bit, helped me control my temper, helped me stop smoking"

"Get my head sorted away from drugs"

A number of young people also acknowledged that being in secure care has improved contact with family.

"Me and my mum never spoke before I came in here, now we have good contact because she has realised that I am safe. I have nowhere to run. I ran from my problems but I can't run from them in here, I have to face up to my problems and get them sorted out. I had quite a lot of issues - it's good"

"Its done well for me, sorted family problems"

Some young people felt that there were little or no benefits to being in secure care and questioned its purpose.

"It helped me the first time but not the second"

"No I'm just kept in 24/7"

"Doesn't benefit me in education"

"It is to far away from home"

Admission to Secure Accommodation

When we asked the young people to share their views and experiences of their admission into secure accommodation a high number admitted that they were scared and didn't know what to expect.

"It was a bit shocking as I had never been in a secure unit or jail before so I did not know what to expect, when I came in all I heard was all these keys rattling and all these guys coming"

"It's scary when you get locked in your room"

"The door locked behind me and I thought oh no what's going on. I was petrified so scared"

"When I first came in I have never been so scared in my life. I just sat there I never spoke. I just sat there, so scared"

Some young people discussed that when they met other young people and staff they felt more at ease and settled.

"It was ok as I knew someone"

"All the staff especially were brand new, same with the boys in the unit, everyone was fine"

There were many discussions regarding strip-searching and how humiliated young people felt.

"Got strip-searched by police. I was embarrassed"

"Didn't want strip search"

"I first came here I did not like it when I got told to get stripped. I did not like that. Then I got asked to do star jumps, it was horrible as you can imagine"

Settling In

The young people were asked to give their views on whether they found it easy to settle in, make friends, and build relationships with staff and what would have helped them to make this easier? Some young people felt that they had a good relationship with the staff and identified at least one member of staff they could talk to.

"The staff were really nice, you can talk to them about anything"

"The staff are brand new. The staff would come and talk to you and try to build a relationship of trust, I thought this was helpful for me especially as I had never been away from my mum or anybody like that for a lengthy period. They have supported me through everything"

"I like my key worker, she helps me"

However, some young people offered advice regarding how staff could have improved their experience.

"Staff should go a bit easier on new young people"

"A fag would have helped me settle in"

"It's crap that I can't get to phone my friends"

"Wasn't allowed a visit from family for a week and a half"

Rights in Secure Accommodation

Most of the young people consulted had some awareness of their rights in secure accommodation.

"Knew I can phone social worker and lawyer anytime and your entitled to three meals, never got book" [about my rights]

"If you are bad you get put in your room, you can't get put in your room for over 24 hours"

"Yes, I am aware of my rights and I have used them when I wanted a complaints form and everything was fine"

"Yes cause of you" [Who Cares? Scotland]

"However, the young people were very frank regarding some staff not being aware of young people's rights"

"Staff don't care about rights"

"Think staff need to learn about children's rights"

"We just get laughed at"

"What rights?"

The young people were also very aware of when their rights were being violated.

"Workmen going into your room without your permission shouldn't be allowed"

"Businessmen strolling around forgetting young people live there"

"No curtains in your room door windows people can see you getting changed"

"I would like to call my family and my girlfriend to find out how my baby is"

Contact with Family and Friends

Maintaining contact with family and friends was a huge issue for young people in secure accommodation. Some spoke of the positives:

"We get to use the phone everyday for 10 minutes, a mobile for 5"

"Free stamps for family"

"Write letters all the time"

"See my family twice a week"

However, there were major concerns regarding the lack of contact, and the barriers that prohibited contact.

"Yes but can't even give them a hug when they visit which is hard. Everyone needs a hug. Would be nice to have privacy and a nice family room"

"Mum doesn't like supervised visits"

"Don't even get to hold my own baby"

"It takes my dad 3 ½ hours to get here and the visit only last an hour"

"The visiting room here isn't very nice"

"It's been messed up by people before bringing in drugs"

"Can't phone home before six and my mum is sometimes out"

Young people were also very concerned with the lack of contact they were allowed to have with their friends when in the secure units and felt this issue needed to be addressed.

"Family - yes, Friends - you are not allowed to phone them. Friends don't get to visit"

"Don't get contact with friends"

"It would be better if I could phone friends"

"Friends under 16 should be able to come and visit"

What Works in Secure Accommodation?

Young people were asked to offer their views about what works in a secure unit.

"I've changed my behaviour"

"My attitude is better"

"Is good you can't get into trouble"

There was some discussion regarding programmes of intervention

"The programmes are good. The staff help you and advise you about different situations. The programmes have been beneficial to a lot of people. Young people try to say that they don't but that's just to make them look big in front of their pals. They have been beneficial. They have been big time beneficial. If I was out now I would rather try to speak to people when before I would fight because now I think about the consequences. It's been beneficial to me"

Some young people were very negative about the experience and felt that secure accommodation offered no solution to their problems.

"You feel institutionalised"

"Don't care if anything works"

"Just want out"

"It's not a bad place but there are not many good bits"

The young people involved in the consultation were then asked to discuss what life is like in secure care. Most agreed that it was all right.

"It's ok, not that bad"

"It could be worse and could be better"

"Not as bad as people make out"

"School is better, the teachers understand you if you have problems"

There were numerous suggestions as to how to improve their experience.

"Secure is boring; there is nothing to do. Should have things to do apart from swimming or weights or football"

"You get to do some normal things"

"You should get more phone calls"

"Some things like spending lots of time in your room, as a sanction doesn't do me any good"

"I think they should have a lot more activities, like a bigger variety of stuff in the gym, football coaches and stuff like that. Athletics or trampoline instead of sitting about in the unit all the time"

"They should promote a healthy lifestyle like the gym and the food. I think there should be a lot more pasta, tuna etc. Rather than chips, pizza etc"

Plans for Moving On...

Young people were asked to discuss their plans for moving out of secure accommodation and where they would be staying. Most young people had an idea of where they hoped to be going when they were discharged.

"I'm going back to stay with my mum. She is moving and I am going to stay with her and I am going to play football for a team at a semi-professional level"

"Going home"

"Going to Caps carers"

"Own tenancy"

"Keep the head down"

Advice for Other Young People

Lastly, the young people were asked if they could give a young person admitted to secure advice, what would it be? As the individual experience is unique so is the advice given, we feel that all these comments should be shared.

"Believe and it will be a positive stay. Do the programmes because they do work but you need to believe in them. If you don't want them to work then they won't work, if you want to change then you will change"

"Keep your head down"

"Do as your told"

"Communicate with staff"

"It takes a couple of days to settle in"

"Don't run away"

"Don't hide letters"

"Go to school"

"Do well with points"

"When you get out, don't come back"

"Keep your trap shut"

"Keep your head down"

"Don't get into bother"

"Take each day as it comes"

"Keep the head down and behave and get certificates"

"Listen to staff and keep the head down"

"Just get on with everyone"

"Make sure you talk to people about problems so when you get out you are ready"

"Stick in at school and they get work experience"

"Don't be scared it is a nice place. Give it a try. Most people turn their nose up at it"

"I'd heard really bad things. I knew this laddie and he told me really bad stories. I was petrified to come in. I settled in really quickly and the staff are really nice, they are just like normal people"

Key Themes Identified by Young People

In the groups young people worked hard to tell us what it was like to be deprived of their liberty. From the discussions, insights emerged with clear implications for policy and practice. The picture the young people presented is complex. However, they are able to offer some solutions. In their view immediate change is called for on a number of levels. It is fair to say that the young people in the groups were not aware of new legislation, policy direction or practice initiatives. Yet they share an awareness of what needs to change and they have some ideas about how to effect change. The Government's commitment to seeing young people as an essential part of the solution, not just as part of the problem is important. Most of the young people appreciated being consulted. This was particularly evident amongst those young people in secure accommodation on a sentence as they felt that most research is directed at those placed by the Children's Hearing System. This might indicate that other ways could be found to involve them directly in the process of change.

The task of this consultation was to identify the key points that would support our central purpose i.e. to inform our understanding of what goes on in secure units and how this affects the young people who live there. Three key themes emerged from the consultation groups:

Contact

Contact is a key issue for young people. There appear to be major differences in levels of contact dependent on which establishment young people were placed. In one unit young people are given as many stamps as required to maintain contact with family and friends. However, in another they are restricted to a set amount per week. There are also vast differences between times allowed to make personal phone calls. Some units issued phone cards; some are restricted to a set amount per week and others allowed daily phone calls. There are also differences between visits with family and friends. In one establishment due to families allegedly breaching the rules by bringing in drugs all physical contact with families has been stopped. Most units did not allow or encourage contact with friends, either through phone calls or visits.

Some young people have experienced more than one placement in secure accommodation and are aware of systems that are in place in other establishments. They found it unfair and inconsistent and believed that it shouldn't matter which unit you were placed in the contact you receive should be the same. There are many differences between the establishments that are potentially useful in meeting the diverse needs of the young people who are placed there. However, it is possible to develop a coherent set of policies and procedures about contact and correspondence that are universally recognised.

Young people found it very difficult to be placed in a secure unit which was located miles away from their family home. They found that there were issues regarding transport, costs, childcare and isolation. They acknowledged that whilst it may not be possible due to lack of available placements every attempt should be made to place them in the establishment closest to their home.

Rights

When discussing their rights most young people had some awareness. However, there was a lack of clarity regarding what rights young people have in secure care. None of the young people consulted were given a rights booklet that was relevant to their placement. Young people wanted a clear and concise guide as to what their rights are. The majority were clear on what to do if they felt their rights weren't being upheld and some discussed their experiences of using complaints system. Young people were extremely concerned about the lack of staff knowledge and awareness of children's rights and felt that training would be beneficial.

Twelve years ago, in September 1992, Scotland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). By so doing, Scotland made a formal commitment under international law to implement the principles and provisions of the UNCRC. An internationally agreed framework of minimum standards for the well being of every child, the UNCRC defines 41 substantive rights for children and young people under eighteen years of age. These rights are commonly grouped under four themes: *survival, development, protection and participation*. (4)

The latter theme is articulated in particular in Article 12, one of the UNCRC's four general principles recognised as such because they are fundamental to the implementation of all rights named in the UNCRC. Article 12 stipulates the right of all children and young people under eighteen years to participate in decision-making processes affecting them in accordance with their age and maturity. (4)

Perhaps more so than any other article in the UNCRC, Article 12 promotes and provides for the recognition of children and young people under eighteen as active subjects with rights as well as recipients of adult care and concern. While action favourable to the vindication of children's rights has been taken in countries throughout the world, the status of children as such and their right to be heard in the context of decision-making processes affecting them remain a practical and psychological challenge at both an institutional and an individual level in the majority of the 191 countries that have ratified the CRC since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1989. (4)

Strip Searching

A number of the young people consulted discussed their experiences of being strip-searched on their admission into the units. They described it as 'horrible, degrading and unnecessary'. They talked about being strip-searched by both police and staff and were unclear as to whose responsibility it was to carry out this procedure. Young people understood that it could be seen as a protection measure but felt that it was a frightening and humiliating experience.

Strip-searching could be seen as a breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 19 states Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

In addition Article 37 states Parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- (b) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. (5)

It is also worth looking at the use of strip-search in terms of institutional abuse. Gil (1982) provides a broad definition:

'...any system, programme, policy, procedure or individual interaction with a child in placement that abuses, neglects, or is detrimental to the child's health, safety, or emotional and physical well-being, or in any way exploits or violates the child's basic rights.' (6)

Strip-searching a young person is by definition an intrusive act and can emphasise the differences in the power relationship that exists between young people and staff in a negative or indeed a bullying way. What is the rationale or the proportionality of routinely strip-searching children on arrival in a secure unit, particularly for a population more likely than the average to have experienced abuse?

And if a child resists, can you justify him or her being held down by adults and forcibly undressed? Secure units recognise the sensitivities around the strip searching of young people, and they do emphasise the need for staff to be aware of specific child protection issues. However, there are many occasions when a young person arrives in a secure unit on an emergency admission and staff are unaware of their background due to a lack of information or incomplete case history.

The methods used to perform a strip search are decided by each establishment without central guidance. Each secure unit operates its own policy according to their security needs. Young people feel that policies regarding the use of strip-searching needed to be developed immediately. And if strip-searching were to continue there needs to be an improvement in the training of staff working in secure establishments as the young people believe staff receive little or no training in how to carry out strip-searches.

Match what you miss

Young people were asked as an 'icebreaker' to write down nine aspects of their lives they missed whilst they were in secure accommodation.

We received 122 responses:

- Hobbies 22
- Friends 21
- Freedom 18
- Home & Community 17
- Family 15
- Drugs & Alcohol 15
- Pets 6
- Police 3
- Jewellery 3
- School 2

The most frequent response received was that young people missed their hobbies. Young people in secure miss the activities that teenagers do to avoid boredom and create enjoyment.

Young people also placed a big emphasis on missing their friends. This reiterates the point made earlier about the importance young people place on maintaining contact with friends when in secure care. Another key aspect that young people frequently missed was their family. In all the groups, the young people talked a lot about their families. Most were trying to maintain links with family and close friends while in secure accommodation. Whether their experiences had been positive or negative, it was clear that almost all the young people ascribed considerable value to parenting and the role of the family.

Young people also placed significant importance on their home and local community. They missed local amenities such swimming, cinema and skating. There were also a number of references to missing being able to drink, smoke and in some cases take drugs.

Hobbies

I miss playing football
I miss the go-karts
Shopping (x2)
Sunbeds
Holidays
Weekends
Dancing
My wide screen
My motorbike
Cinema
Hobes

Outings
Swimming
TV
Having a laugh
I miss my music
Bikes
My good CD's
Swimming
Friday night
Ice-skating

Friends

Not being with my friend
Pals/Friends (x12)
Friends and family
Seeing my pal in jail
Girl friend

Football with friends
Boyfriend
The fun with my friend
Drinking with pals at the weekend
Girlfriend

Freedom

I miss my freedom (x6)
Stay up at night
Walking
Going out
Weekends

I miss running mad
Open door
Outside
Having a good time
Privacy (x4)

Home and Community

House/Home (x5)
Glasgow
The baker's
Sky digital (x2)
Decent food

Shops
My own bed (x3)
My own area (x2)
Town

Family

I miss my family (x12)
My wee nephew
Foster parents
My baby

Drugs and Alcohol

I miss smoking/fag's (x8)
Vodka
Smoking hash (x2)

Drink/Booze (x3)
Drugs (x2)

Pets

I miss my pets (x2)
Dog (x4)

Police

Getting my head nipped fay the polis
Getin chased by the police
The Police

Jewellery

Jewelry
My jalray
Big ear rings

School

School (x2)

Section 3

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