

# Let's Face It!

Care for the Future • Recommendations for Practice



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## Care for the Future

### Recommendations for Practice



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## Background

Promoting the views of children and young people has always been central to the work of Who Cares? Scotland. Having produced 'Let's Face It! Care 2003 · Young People Tell Us How It Is' Who Cares? Scotland felt it was vital that the valuable views, experiences and recommendations it contained should not be consigned to what might become a theoretical text. Who Cares? Scotland made a commitment to young people that we would ensure their voices were not lost.

After producing the original report and during our 25th anniversary conference, Who Cares? Scotland took the opportunity to consult delegates with a view to producing recommendations for practice. This publication is a result of these consultations. Who Cares? Scotland would ask that this is seen as an opportunity to work individually and in partnership to ensure the voices of young people are heard and to actively pursue the provision of improved public care services.

## Acknowledgements

Who Cares? Scotland would like to thank the following people for their support in the production of this report:

- The young people who were involved in the production of Let's Face It! Care 2003 · Young People Tell Us How It Is
- Everyone who participated in the Let's Face It! Conference in November 2003
- Consultation group facilitators and scribes
- Jane Whiteford and Pauline Boyce for their support in the production of this publication
- We gratefully acknowledge the support of our funding bodies and those with whom we work in partnership, who have either directly or indirectly supported the production of this publication, including: The Scottish Executive; Local Authorities; The Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care; Other Voluntary Organisations

Copies of 'Let's Face It! Care 2003 – Young People Tell Us How It Is' can be obtained by contacting Who Cares? Scotland (contact details on back cover)

# Methodology

## Purpose

All too often the recommendations from consultation and research reports remain within the bounds of the document. To facilitate the implementation of the recommendations made by young people in the original report, Who Cares? Scotland undertook consultation with professionals who attended the conference launching the said report in November 2003. The result is this publication which will be distributed to service providers in Scotland.

## Process

On day two of the conference delegates were randomly split into 9 focus groups to consider a selection of identified recommendations from the report. All recommendations were covered by the focus groups. The groups were facilitated and scribed by staff from Who Cares? Scotland and relevant staff were briefed prior to the conference. Initially groups agreed ground rules and undertook a short introductory exercise. Subsequently each group was asked to consider the following points in relation to each of their recommendations: how it related to the work they do; how they could specifically, realistically and practically take things forward.

The information from these focus groups was transcribed, collated and analysed for the production of this publication.

## Participation

### Let's Face It! Conference, Erskine Bridge (November 2003)

*Summary of delegates who participated in the focus groups:*

Delegates were representative of a range of sectors including; Residential Care, Foster Care, Voluntary Sector, Social Work, Education, Health, International Organisations, The Scottish Executive, Care Commission, Scottish Social Services Council, Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care, Children's Rights Services, Independent Residential Schools.

This included; practitioners, managers, academics, civil servants, young people.

There was representation from 27 Scottish Local Authorities.

## Who Cares? Scotland Recommendations

The recommendations from Who Cares? Scotland in the original report ‘Let’s Face It! Care 2003 · Young People Tell Us How It Is’ (developed from the views and experiences of young people) are set out below. While these provide a convenient reference source for this publication it is recommended that you read the original report to understand these recommendations in context.

### Recommendations from Young People

The recommendations are drawn from all of the young people’s views. Ultimately, their desire for a positive care experience is the driving force behind these recommendations. It is hoped that policy makers and practitioners will receive them not as criticisms, but as the young people intended, an opportunity to further develop and improve care services.

In the course of the consultations it became apparent that many fundamental rights are still denied to some young people. Whilst many of the young people did not refer to them as such, rights are intrinsically linked to the issues and themes contained in this report. The basic principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Non-discrimination; Best interests of the child; Survival and development; and Participation, underpin the recommendations listed below and therefore should be given full consideration.

### My Care Experience

- Explore and address the right to be protected from discrimination as stated in Article 2 of the UNCRC, with particular attention to issues of respect, stereotyping, stigma and negative discrimination for looked after and accommodated young people
- Promote understanding of the reasons young people are admitted into care and challenge the culture of blame attached to being in the care system
- Identify and promote Article 12 of the UNCRC: the right of young people to express their views freely in all matters affecting them with particular attention to such representation in social work reports, care plans, children’s hearings and reviews

- Ensure Article 12 (Participation) and Article 3 (Best Interests of the Child) of the UNCRC are examined in relation to working with young people in order to ensure the impact of service is beneficial and as intended
- Recognise and encourage that listening to young people and taking their views seriously engenders trust and promotes participation in decision-making and indeed participation in other aspects of the young person's life
- Scrutinise and evaluate the decisions made and action taken in relation to young people's lives
- Further promote understanding and discussion on the principles of confidentiality and privacy in terms of their relative and discretionary use, and their relationship to child protection
- Work towards de-escalation practice and non aggressive methods of intervention in residential child care
- Proactively work with young people to offer support and assistance
- Acknowledge and document young people's experiences through care by including photographs, life story work and diaries as part of the care plan, and that such documentation moves with the child
- Identify the means by which young people can visit previous care placements and consider a mechanism by which young people can retain relationships after leaving a placement
- Investigate the reasons for the high turnover of residential staff and also the lack of retention of residential child care staff, and examine the use of short term contracts, sessional staff, and the impact of these arrangements on young people
- Reassess and provide preparation and training for new residential child care staff with particular attention to their understanding of young people and why they are in care
- Reassess and provide training, supervision, and appraisal for all residential care staff as part of good and safe child care practice
- Recognise that young people value advocacy and that the best possible advocacy service depends on the acknowledgement of their right to be heard and partnership between all relevant agencies

## My Safety in Care

- Further explore and implement Article 19 of the UNCRC which states that state parties apply 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 parents, legal guardians or any other person who has care of the child
- Address the protection of children without families as stated in Article 20 of the UNCRC, specifically the state's obligation to provide 'special protection' for children deprived of their family environment, and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is made available to them
- Acknowledge that many young people are in care due to a lack of protection alongside the assumption that they are safer in care
- Further develop the knowledge and skills required to identify and respond to the bullying of young people by their peers
- Further assess and plan the work with communities to reduce the bullying of young people by the community
- Implement training for staff on the use and abuse of power including an exploration into the use of bullying as inappropriate and damaging practice
- Promote the fact that young people feel safer in an environment where verbal and physical aggression are kept to a minimum
- Understand that young people will not feel safe with new members of staff and that a degree of safety comes with the building of a relationship
- Rethink and question the use of restraint as common practice, to evaluate the use of restraint and its effectiveness to date, and to train adults in other methods of intervention in order to make clear it is used as a very rare and last resort
- Ensure a fully comprehensive and understandable complaints procedure is in place, including creating a culture that complaints are taken seriously
- Work in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland and Children's Rights Officers to promote young people's views and support the making of complaints

- Develop further understanding of the relationship between young people’s mental health and safety and protection matters, and to make links between the occasional lack of safety in care and the impact of this on young people’s mental well being
- Provide therapeutic services that address mental health issues for young people and provide support for them
- Provide training on young people’s mental well being and therefore support adults to support extremely vulnerable young people

## My Personal Life

### Family

- Demonstrate a fundamental commitment to contact and the value of family – irrespective of dysfunctional background, inline with Article 8 of the UNCRC – preservation of identity
- Develop and implement clear and flexible arrangements regarding family contact
- Maximise family contact – appropriate to each individual, as stated in Article 9 of the UNCRC – separation from parents
- Support young people and their families with contact (including, but not only, transport)
- Demonstrate a commitment to the maintenance of sibling groups
- Ensure regular contact with other siblings – including those who may be adopted
- Enable access to bereavement counselling
- Provide support to young people and their families to resolve family issues/problems with regard to, where appropriate, Article 18 of the UNCRC – parental responsibilities
- Facilitate access to, and private use of, a telephone with due attention to Article 16 of the UNCRC – protection of privacy
- Organise regular, and improved, communication between professionals, families and young people

- Foster greater participation of young people and their families in decisions regarding family contact
- Demonstrate a commitment to Articles 3 and 12 of the UNCRC by consulting with young people in all aspects relating to their family
- Ensure access to up to date information about their family
- Acknowledge and record the young person's identity and family, by means such as life story work

## Friends

- Respect for and support with, the young person's right in relation to Article 15 of the UNCRC – freedom of association
- Provide support with, and the opportunity to maintain friendships
- Promote positive relationships between young people in care
- Provide young people with clear information regarding the purpose and process of police checks
- Explore and develop means of reducing the stigmatising effects of police checks
- Operate an efficient process for police checks which reduces time scales
- Implement pro-active and therapeutic approach to dealing with trust issues for young people
- Give due consideration to the geography of a young person's placement in relation to their origin
- Have due regard for the placement of an individual in a group setting – taking into account the other young people living there
- Promote the participation of young people in community groups and/or activities
- Provide support for young people from staff/carers in participating in groups/ activities
- Allow the opportunity for time with friends which doesn't impinge on family contact
- Organise and implement planned placement moves, over reasonable time scales

# The Way Forward

- Introduction
- Attitudes & Awareness
- Training, Education & Qualifications



# Introduction

This document, in the shape of ‘Recommendations for Practice’, is the culmination of two years work for Who Cares? Scotland. It represents our commitment to looked after and accommodated young people: that their voices will be heard and that their experience and expertise will form the basis from which we campaign for change.

It is heartening to realise that the many professionals, within the care sector, who took part in the ‘Let’s Face It! Care 2003 – Young People Tell us How It Is’ Launch Conference in November 2003; have heard the views of young people, taken on board the original recommendations contained within the Let’s Face It! report and powerfully expressed how we can improve services and move forward. We now add their voices to the call for change.

The Recommendations for Practice which follow propose, under key headings, the necessary changes we must now engage. Some are strategic, some are institutional and some are individual, but all are our collective responsibility.

## Attitudes & Awareness

From the delegates consulted on the issue of the stigma attached to young people in care, there appeared to be a consensus that a strategic approach was required to educate the public to change their attitude and behaviour in relation to young people who are/have been in care. More generally it was felt that the overall stigma attached to social work and the care system should be challenged. There was also recognition that this action should occur at both a local and national level.

While the media was considered to be instrumental in reinforcing the negative image and stereotypes of young people, it was also identified as an appropriate vehicle to effect positive change. Suggestions for the implementation of positive change included campaigns such as 'Let's Not Discriminate' and/or the message 'Children are the Future' which could be used to highlight the fact that young people in care deserve the same opportunities in life, as afforded to other young people. Furthermore, it was recommended that a national company could provide backing for a campaign to improve the image of young people in care using various aspects of the media. Television programmes (particularly 'soap operas') were another medium suggested as a highly effectively tool in raising awareness of issues for this group of young people.

In terms of the print media, it was stated that more work could be undertaken with the press to promote the reporting of 'good news' stories in newspapers and magazines, rather than the consistent focus on negative articles. It was also proposed that a children's book could be written, primarily for looked after young people but potentially for a wider audience, aimed at removing the blame culture associated with being 'in care'.

In terms of those adults (in the system) who already work closely with young people it was felt a blame culture can sometimes prevail which is not beneficial. Therefore there is a need to also change values and attitudes within the care sector. A multi disciplinary approach was considered particularly helpful in this regard, with the need for greater emphasis on educating the many professionals in relation to the importance of positive values and attitudes. It was also suggested that the notion of the corporate parent should be examined and challenged with regard to roles and responsibilities.

### Specific areas to be addressed:

- Young people should be thought of and related to as individuals
- Young people's actions should be placed in context and not viewed as an isolated incident
- Professionals should put effort into forming a bond with young people
- Professionals should take time to find out what is important to young people

- Consideration should be given to the language used when working with young people  
avoiding negative or stereotypical reinforcement
- A more diverse approach to empowering young people could be employed, for example, the provision of assertiveness training

Specific reference was made to challenging the climate and culture of residential care provision. It was noted that many establishments would benefit from creating a more open culture, with particular emphasis placed on developing a culture which was based on a children's rights approach to service provision.

- Residential staff should be provided with training regarding the reasons young people come into care
- Concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping and stigma must be examined and explained
- Greater consideration and consistency are needed with regard to privacy and confidentiality

## Training, Education & Qualifications

The recognition, from the delegates, of the important role of on-going training and education in relation to working with young people in care was clearly evident. The need for consistent and accessible training was registered, however the requirement of a realistic solution to staff replacement issues and associated costs was acknowledged. It was noted that an integral part of the training process should be an appraisal system which is available to everyone (including temporary staff).

The opportunity for staff groups to undertake training together was identified as a positive way to engender a consistent approach with young people. This was coupled with recognition of the benefits of multi disciplinary training, with regard to developing awareness and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others.

### Specific areas of training identified as priorities were:

- Managing challenging behaviour
- Crisis work
- Working with families
- Parenting skills
- Attachment
- Separation and loss
- Counselling skills
- Child development
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Examining self-awareness (in relation to personal and professional impact on other people)

In general terms it was suggested that training should incorporate practical methods for implementing theory. This should take into account the reality of working with individuals in a care setting.

Induction training was specifically identified as having a significant influence on the development of individuals within their role. This was considered an area which required greater emphasis and value. There was recognition of the need for a statutory induction period, affording the opportunity for individuals to be provided with sufficient and consistent information and training to undertake their role. Furthermore, a pre-induction process which incorporated an information pack and shadowing was deemed crucial.

### Proposals for inclusion in induction were:

- A children's rights approach to working with young people
- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

- Bullying
- Managing challenging behaviour (with an emphasis on de-escalation rather than physical restraint)
- Complaints procedures
- The involvement of other agencies regarding their role
- The UNCRC and its practical implementation
- The importance of the participation of young people
- The value in listening to young people

While there was recognition of the value of a fully qualified workforce, this was not considered to be sufficient if achieved in isolation. It was suggested that there must also be the opportunity for continuing professional development through certificated training courses. This prompted further discussion regarding levels of qualification, their suitability and achievement. The recommendation from delegates, that the ultimate goal should be the qualification, to degree level, of residential staff must be noted.

There were comments suggesting that aspects of the SVQ in Social Care would benefit from being re-written, however the need for more internal and external assessors to speed up the process was also noted.

The need for adequate levels of support was repeatedly identified as important in supporting staff to achieve qualifications.

# The Way Forward

• Young People's Lives in Care



## Young People's Lives in Care

In considering the overall care experience of young people, a number of underpinning practical measures were identified by delegates which would promote positive change. There was recognition of the need for a flexible service which meets the needs of the individual, and the necessity of a move towards a more open culture was reiterated, with a requirement of internal and external monitoring procedures.

In relation to placements delegates stated the need to move towards placements which were based on the young person's needs rather than availability. It was recommended that a risk assessment is carried out for each young person prior to placement, to ensure they were being placed in a suitable environment, which would not be detrimental to their progress and development. With regard to group living environments, full consideration should be given to the impact of new young people on the young people already living there. A further concern raised by delegates reflected the view that reception into care packs could be overwhelming, therefore some suggested young people could be given the information gradually.

Moving towards more creative and therapeutic work with young people was considered beneficial; recognising that increased use of a range of services such as advocates, play therapists and counsellors would enable young people to receive meaningful and intensive support with issues. The need to promote the participation of young people, in all aspects of their care, was consistently identified with the recommendation that this included the completion of exit interviews when moving on from each placement. When specifically looking at direct work with young people, consideration should be given to the use of language which makes assumptions about the young person's understanding of jargon and/or legislation. It was recommended that good practice would entail always checking meaning with young people.

There was also recognition that budgets, and the ways in which they are operated, coupled with levels of bureaucracy, could be restrictive in providing quality of care.

### **Specific areas identified in relation to quality of care:**

#### **Confidentiality:**

- Participation of young people about 'who receives what information'
- A consistent multi-disciplinary approach to confidentiality
- General improvement in standards of confidentiality

#### **Children's Rights:**

- Development of a shared understanding of the UNCRC
- Awareness raising for young people
- Specific discussion about UNCRC in relation to roles and responsibilities

### **Support for Young People:**

- Improved information regarding their reception into care pack
- Increased resources to meet the needs of young people (particularly those with intensive support needs)
- Improved interaction with regard to family contact
- Improvements in multi-disciplinary support for young people
- Increased resources for throughcare and aftercare

### **Monitoring:**

- Monitoring based on The National Care Standards
- Clearly identified role for The Care Commission
- Involvement of Who Cares? Scotland and Children's Rights Services
- Increase in the number of unannounced inspections

### **Staff and Carers:**

- Involvement of young people in the recruitment process
- Appropriate levels of staffing
- Planned and positive approach to moving on staff who are unsuitable/struggling to cope with their role
- Opportunity to question practice openly

### **Environment:**

- Move towards smaller residential units
- Improvement in the quality and standards
- Promotion of happier, non-aggressive environments

## **Parents and Families**

While a majority of issues in relation to families will be dealt with under the heading 'Young People's Personal Lives', there were aspects specifically identified by delegates which relate to young people's care experience. In particular, the need for greater emphasis on support and training services for parents was recognised, with the aim of reducing the risk of young people coming into care and resolving issues to enable their return to the family home (where appropriate). Furthermore it was considered appropriate to provide families with information regarding the young person's placement, perhaps in a similar form to the reception into care pack received by young people.

## Residential Staff

Focussing on group living situations, great importance was attached to supporting and valuing staff. There was a clearly stated need for an integrated approach to supervision, appraisal and training; ensuring staff were supported to develop the necessary knowledge, values and skills for their post. Particular emphasis was repeatedly placed on team building and the development of individual and team action plans. There was also recognition of the difficult and complex role of residential workers and the need to both evaluate and potentially reconsider their role. Furthermore, staffing levels, turnover and burnout were areas identified as requiring immediate attention.

### Training, Development and Support:

- Statutory probationary period
- Empowerment of staff
- Consideration of motivational factors
- Increased staff resources to facilitate more one-to-one work with young people
- Rewarding staff in their roles rather than promoting them
- Improved staff organisation and resources
- Decrease in the number of short term contracts
- Regular reviews of working relationships with young people
- Clear guidelines for staff regarding touch and affection
- Provision of dedicated professionals to support staff with specialist areas e.g. education, health etc.
- Clear guidelines for challenging bad practice
- Introduction of staff counsellors
- McCrone style enquiry into residential staffing

There were a number of recommendations made regarding the provision of quality supervision for residential staff. Supervision was considered to have an important role in valuing staff and providing an opportunity for feedback and development. Therefore much discussion centred around practical issues to improve the experience of supervision.

### Recommendations on Supervision:

- Training in supervision theory and practice for supervisors
- Provision of regular supervision, which is structured and recorded
- Consideration of the management of supervision
- Supervision should be supportive
- Supervision should take place in an appropriate venue
- Supervision should be part of a process and not seen in isolation

## Social Work Staff

The influential role of field social work staff in the lives of young people who are looked after and accommodated was repeatedly referred to; the importance of a partnership approach to working with young people and the provision of a seamless service were areas which require further consideration. There was also a clearly stated need for more early intervention and family work by social work staff.

The desire for a statutory induction period to improve knowledge and understanding prior to uptake of post was reiterated, with the suggestion that this should include training on; the UNCRC and its practical implementation; the participation of young people; and listening to young people. Full consideration should also be given to how this induction process is implemented and evaluated to assess its effectiveness.

## Foster Care & Adoption

Focussing on foster care and adoption, delegates emphasised that full consideration must be given to the individual needs and best interests of the child at all times. Services need to be more responsive and sensitive taking account of the personal experiences, feelings and views of young people. There was recognition that good practice entails the wishes and needs of the young person and their family being fully assessed prior to any decision regarding adoption.

- Increased involvement of young people in planning
- Empowerment of foster carers
- Challenge perceptions and values of foster carers and adoptive parents
- Preparation and training for foster carers and adoptive parents
- Clear and flexible guidelines regarding family contact

## Reviews & Children's Panels

There was recognition that while both reviews and children's panels should have the young person participating as central to the process, this is often not realised. It was therefore suggested that both reviews and hearings would benefit from an evaluation of venue and format. The need to see the young person as a whole and not an isolated incident was reiterated in relation to both of these processes.

With regard to reviews, it was stated that consideration should be given to who is in attendance and the question of whose needs are being met. It was acknowledged that

greater emphasis should be placed on the participation of the young person, and examining positive aspects of their lives and future planning. Delegates identified that more attention should be given to personal aspects of their lives including friends and personal interests.

With this in mind further training and awareness raising were identified as a way of providing children's panel members with a better understanding of the issues faced by young people who are in care.

### **Recommendations for Children's Panel Members:**

- Challenging perceptions and values
- Opportunities to visit various types of care placements
- Involvement of young people in training
- Increased levels of communication with other agencies
- Reinforcement of the principle of speaking to the young person on their own

### **Complaints**

There was awareness of the need for a more transparent and effective complaints procedure which is young person friendly. Delegates also suggested that the time scale for dealing with complaints should be reduced with young people provided with clear and consistent feedback.

- Complaints handled by an independent agency
- Reinforce the role of Who Cares? Scotland and Children's Rights Officers
- Change staff perceptions and attitudes about the right to complain
- Reinforce the 'quality' aspect of complaints
- Awareness raising with young people – it's their right to complain
- Consideration of the method used – some young people don't like 'form filling'

# The Way Forward

- Young People's Safety in Care



## Young People's Safety in Care

Delegates reiterated that the safety of young people must be paramount in relation to policy, practice and services. There was recognition that it is the role of all professionals to be alert to signs indicating that a young person doesn't feel safe and to treat all concerns/complaints seriously.

The importance of and need for external monitoring was once again stated, noting that this requires educating and raising the awareness of staff/carers as they can be fearful and resistant of such changes. More opportunities for joint training on risk assessment and child protection were considered crucial to the provision of a safe environment. Furthermore, the need for risk assessment as an on-going process focussing on the safety of the young person was acknowledged.

A specific focus on training with regard to the safety of young people was considered necessary, with improved record keeping ensuring that this training is regularly updated. It was suggested that good practice for every placement would be to provide young people with information about their safety and their rights, including their right of refuge. Residential units in particular should provide clear information to young people about which staff will be on duty and when. Again the need for greater focus on therapeutic work with young people was raised.

### Restraint – De-escalation

The use of restraint prompted the plea that the ultimate goal must be to remove restraint in a structured and systematic way, placing greater emphasis on de-escalation. Risk assessments should incorporate health issues, past experiences and background of the individual young person. Where there are identified issues the young person should be supported with a more therapeutic approach to anger management. It was also noted that young people should be made more aware of the fact that physical restraint is a last option and this should be reflected in the culture of units, with a move away from the language currently in use, replacing 'physical restraint' with 'de-escalation'. It was considered beneficial in this regard that a 'chill out room' should be made available to young people (which is 'not a cell'), and furthermore that young people could be involved in the design of this room.

External monitoring was again discussed and viewed as an appropriate means of challenging the culture in relation to restraint, allowing for the opportunity to consider practice and consistency. Clearer guidelines should be developed for dealing with situations with a prominent focus on de-escalation, and made available to all staff.

### **Training:**

- Ensure training is provided for all residential staff and agency workers
- More focus on theory and de-escalation training than physical intervention
- Promotion of various methods of de-escalation
- Training to develop active listening skills
- Focus on benefits of life space interviews
- On-going training days

### **Recording, Reflection and Monitoring:**

- Reflection after a restraint at an individual level – including cause and possible prevention
- Record incidents in care plans, not as a failing on the young persons part
- Conduct panels exploring situations – and considering how to reduce restraints
- Opportunity for reflection and de-briefing after incidents
- Monitor and evaluate restraint
- Regular external monitoring

## **Bullying**

Delegates expressed that there continues to be the need to identify and implement effective measures for dealing with the issue of bullying. While there were specific recommendations for both bullying in the unit and bullying in the community measures were identified which could equally apply to both.

In general terms it was acknowledged that there should be a pro-active approach to bullying aimed at reducing the level of risk for young people, with clear information available to young people regarding what supports are available to them and ways in which they can deal with situations. Bullying must be handled with sensitivity at all times and should take account of the young persons views on confidentiality (child protection issues permitting). However, it was recognised that staff should also receive specific training on bullying to improve their understanding of the issues and to enable them to provide adequate support and advice to young people. Creative ways to deal with bullying e.g. drama sessions, board games etc. were considered to be beneficial and a possible way forward.

The need for each unit to have an individual bullying policy which is available to both staff and young people was restated. This policy should be young-person-friendly and incorporate information, support services, strategies and confidentiality.

### **Bullying in the Unit:**

- Increased use of available resources e.g. ‘Bully proofing our unit’ pack
- Engage external facilitators to promote awareness/deal with issues e.g. Who Cares? Scotland
- Mentoring scheme for young people
- Provide the opportunity for input from young people on how to deal with bullying
- Staff supporting the young person to challenge bullying in a positive way
- Clear guidelines on confidentiality
- The use of ‘circle time’ techniques
- Re-assuring young people that they will be listened to
- Organise speakers to come to speak about bullying – reasons, consequences etc.
- Create an environment which engenders respect and trust for young people

With regard to bullying in the community the need for a campaign to increase the awareness and understanding of the general public was reiterated. However the use of positive pro-active community work was seen as a possible solution which could be employed.

### **Bullying in the Community:**

- Improve community relations
- Development of community liaison groups
- Involve communities in opening of units
- Introduce young people to community work
- Using community skills, individuals coming in developing links
- Build positive relationships with peers
- Develop good relationship with local councillors
- Being good neighbours
- Develop good relationships with local schools
- Young people should find time to have discussions with their parents
- Raising awareness about what it is like to be in care
- Challenge public attitudes by adults spending time with young people, playing etc.
- Provide young people with positive leisure time options

## **Mental Health**

Recognising issues around the awareness of mental health, it was stated a primary aim should be to develop a better understanding of mental health for both staff and young people. There was also recognition that mental health can be a frightening issue to deal with and staff and carers would benefit from further information, training and specialist support, which in turn would build confidence in dealing with issues.

In acknowledging the stigma attached to mental health, delegates suggested that consideration should be given to the use of language, particularly with young people, suggesting that it could be addressed as ‘how we think and feel’ or ‘emotional and behavioural differences’.

### **Support and Information:**

- More access to specialist support e.g. mental health nurses
- Better access to mental health services
- Development of literature which is less complex

### **Placements:**

- Thorough, multi-disciplinary risk assessments to ensure suitability of placements
- On-going risk assessment process
- Planning to meet the individual needs of young people
- Better and earlier preparation for young people leaving care
- Resources and support should be available for young people
- Increased awareness of young people not feeling safe
- Increased staffing resources in residential units to enable mental health issues to be dealt with

### **Training:**

- Specific training for staff/carers in mental health and associated issues
- Developed understanding of levels of self harm e.g. safe cutting

**Notes:**

# The Way Forward

• Young People's Personal Lives



## Young People's Personal Lives

With regard to the personal aspects of a young person's life it was seen as key to identify who and what is important to the young person as an individual. All possible steps should be taken to ensure young people are not deprived of their most important relationships, with a holistic view being taken of all aspects of a young person's life. The importance of treating young people as individuals (including in group living situations) was once again noted, ensuring the young person is listened to and their views valued and respected.

The need to see care planning as a pro-active, positive process which allows for flexibility and discretion, and incorporating the personal aspects of the young persons' life was stated. It was felt that this in turn would empower young people and reflect the importance of their participation.

A placement as close to the young person's community as possible, with consideration given to their family situation, was viewed as a foundation for good practice. Added to which maximum effort and resources should be applied to keep sibling groups together with increased emphasis on family work.

Considerable discussion focussed on the role of professionals with regard to the personal lives of looked after and accommodated young people. The need for professionals to have a more pro-active role concerning family, friends and community links, in agreement with the young person, was acknowledged. It was also recognised that a greater emphasis should be placed on partnership working to the benefit of young people.

### Young Person Centred Services:

- Young persons involvement in decision making and planning
- Giving young people control to bring everyone together
- Listen and respond to the young person's wishes
- Young people should not have to earn trust
- Flexible services which can respond to individual needs
- Support for family members to represent young people

### Placements:

- Have planned admissions which take into account the young person's family situation
- Make sure there are sufficient resources to keep siblings together
- Placement being appropriately assessed for the individual young person's needs
- Where possible keep young people in their own geographical area
- Young people shouldn't have to be placed where they don't want to live
- Sharing information on the young person's progress

- An increased focus on family work
- Relevant information is held and passed on between placements
- Young people should not be forgotten when they leave their placement

### **Professionals:**

- Staff/carers to do family work as this would raise morale for staff
- Staff/carers need support to allow young people to take risks
- An ethos which allows young people to take risks
- Staff/carers allowing young people to have choice and responsibility – remove blame culture
- Good positive key working between residential staff and young people
- A consistent approach when dealing with young people
- More one-to-one time with young people, including discovering their interests
- Staff should have information on community activities and resources
- A parenting skills course for staff
- Robust assessments with a multi-agency approach
- A partnership approach with clear roles and responsibilities
- The need for partnership working well through care planning
- More joint work with education and school
- Improve liaison role between liaison officer and professionals

### **Families**

A primary aim was considered to be an increase in resources and supports to the family to reduce the risk of young people coming into care, this should include; outreach work in the family home; intensive family support; and coping skills.

Where young people are received into care, they should be placed near their family and community wherever practicable. It was again reiterated that resources and placements should be available to ensure that sibling groups are maintained, and that there is a person centred approach to placements and subsequent care planning.

Furthermore, there was recognition of the need for improved communication links between staff/carers and families. This should incorporate better communication with families in relation to all aspects of the young persons' life including their schooling. The provision of clear guidelines, negotiated with the young person and their family, indicating who should receive what information, would facilitate this process.

## Family Contact

There was a great deal of discussion about family contact and recognition of its importance in the lives of young people. It was stated therefore that more resources and supports should be made available to young people and their families to encourage and maintain contact, with a greater emphasis placed on normality, as far as possible, in family contact situations. Family contact should be regular, flexible and encouraged by staff and carers.

### Support:

- Support from staff/carers
- Qualified social work staff to provide support for young people when they are on home leave with family
- Follow up support after contact

### Facilities:

- Build on outreach-family room made available for families to have meal
- Main door or separate entrance to avoid difficulties passing through unit
- Family being able to stay with young people e.g. siblings etc.

### Family Contact in Placements:

- Encourage family visits to young persons where they live
- Opportunities for 'normal' activities during contact e.g. watching TV, listening to music etc.
- Provision of quiet, confidential comfortable space for family contact

### Resources:

- Financial assistance for transport for families to visit
- Sufficient staff numbers to ensure enough staff on duty to support visits
- More specialist staff to facilitate contact
- Accommodate families at local hotels etc.
- Contact centres away from residential unit or foster home
- Financial assistance to experience leisure activities with family

## Friends

With regard to friendships it was suggested that more emphasis should be placed on gathering information from young people on the importance of particular friendships so that they can be facilitated and supported. Care plans should also refer to friendships and how they can best be promoted. Every effort should be made to ensure young people are friendly and welcoming when a new young person moves

in, although there should be no expectation for them to become friends. It was recommended that a buddy system could be an effective way of helping young people to settle in to a new environment.

Delegates suggested that an increase in opportunities for young people to bring friends to their placement on both a planned and ad-hoc basis for tea, birthday celebrations etc. should be actively encouraged by staff and carers and would be beneficial to young people. In relation to this point it was therefore recommended that placements should be friendly, comfortable, well decorated and a place which the young person would be proud to bring their friends. Including a common visiting area in which young people can have privacy with friends in residential units.

There should also be support and encouragement for young people to maintain friendships when they have moved to another area, including support from staff and active encouragement to use bus/travel passes. The issue of police checks was widely discussed and there was recognition this practice should be challenged as it is only required in cases of particular concern and should not be viewed as mandatory for overnight stays with friends.

## **Communication and Information**

When considering all aspects of communication and information (including sharing information) it was acknowledged the young person must be central to all processes, taking into account identity, family contact and long term planning. There was a call for a concerted effort to improve communication and information sharing between staff/carers, other professionals, young people and their families (taking confidentiality into account).

While there was recognition of safety and protection issues, it was suggested that there were a number of measures which could be implemented to improve communication, facilities and opportunities. Therefore it was recommended that clear, fair and realistic boundaries should be provided and explained to young people, while at the same time staff should place more trust in young people.

- Exploration of creative ways to facilitate communication (including safe internet/e-mail access)
- Make phones more accessible
- Staff training in technology
- Increased opportunities for e-mail/telephone contact (once or twice a week is not enough)

With regard to information it was suggested that focus should also centre on the development and retention of personal ‘life stories’ of young people as crucial, not only with regard to information, but the entire care experience. This should include a range of materials such as photographs (including themselves, staff/carers, family members and friends), provision of cameras, family records etc. It was also considered prudent to keep copies of relevant materials to safeguard them in case of damage or loss. The need for young people to be able to access their files was reiterated by delegates.

# Let's Face It!

Care for the Future • Taking Steps • Conclusion



# Taking Steps

## Examples of developments

It is important to recognise that there have been, and continue to be, a number of developments which go some way to meeting some of the recommendations and solutions contained in the 'Let's Face It!' documents. Some examples of these are set out below.

- 'Taking Care' a national campaign on the BBC network aimed at challenging the stigma attached to young people who are looked after and accommodated
- Who Cares? Scotland delivered a citizenship workshop to first year pupils in Ayr Academy highlighting the issues faced by young people who are looked after and accommodated
- The Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) is setting up a working group to consider media impact and relations
- The Scottish Social Services Council carried out a review of relevant HNC units which then incorporated the views of service users and carers
- The National Care Standards have been produced by The Care Commission and they have subsequently commissioned research into young peoples views on if and how the standards are being met
- Who Cares? Scotland has undertaken a participation consultation with staff and young people to evaluate participation in the work of the organisation
- SIRCC have developed a framework to enable practitioners to publish papers providing theoretical and practical perspectives on residential child care
- Several Local Authorities have organised meetings with Who Cares? Scotland, Children Service Managers and subsequently Unit Managers to look at implementing changes – resulting in immediate changes in some instances
- Who Cares? Scotland have facilitated the involvement of young people in Panel Members training sessions in various local authorities
- The Scottish Executive has commissioned SIRCC to lead the development of guidelines on Physical Restraint

- Who Cares? Scotland workers have facilitated bullying workshops in various residential units
- The Scottish Executive has published 'Protecting children and young people: Framework for Standards'
- NHS Fife and Who Cares? Scotland have undertaken a joint consultation on the health and well-being of young people who are looked after and accommodated
- Gill Ottley (Scottish Social Work Services Inspectorate) has distributed a letter highlighting the fact that police checks are discretionary not compulsory in both residential and foster care – a point also publicised in SIRCCULAR (the SIRCC newsletter)

Although this list is not exhaustive it does provide some relevant examples of how things can be changed.

## Conclusion

The 'Let's Face It!' report and recommendations for practice represent the conclusion of a significant piece of work by Who Cares? Scotland. They are the result of a process which started with the consultation of young people and culminates with a real opportunity to improve care for the future.

The 'Recommendations for Practice' contained in this document provide a number of practical solutions to the issues raised by young people. There are some you will be familiar with and some that are new, innovative ideas. You may look at these solutions and consider that you (or your organisation) already implement a certain degree of these measures but you must ask yourself: could I/we do more? If we are honest with ourselves and listen to what young people tell us, the answer is yes.

Each of us has a responsibility, individually and collectively, to ensure that we actively pursue improvement in practice and service delivery. We can all do more to ensure the effectiveness of what we do; the commitment to better services will lead to better outcomes for young people.

Finally, let's face it, we have the opportunity to improve the provision of public care. Young people have told us how it is, professionals have made their recommendations for practice, we now have everything we need to make it happen!

## Notes:

**Notes:**