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Improving the Educational Experiences of Children and Young People who are Looked After

Fostering Excellence Event

1st December 2016

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Project overview

This was an in depth qualitative study into the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of children and young people who are looked after in Wales commissioned by the Welsh Government.

Objective 1: Conduct an in depth qualitative research study with looked after children and young people, to provide insight into their experience of education and their opinions on what could be done to improve it

Objective 2: Collate and report relevant literature and data

Project Partners – The Fostering Network, Voices from Care Cymru, Spice Innovate
Music and Art Extension Project – Ministry of Life

Methods

- Statistical and literature review - Findings
- Systematic review - Findings
- Creative methods and interviews
- Peer researcher led focus groups



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Engaging children and young people

Move beyond the 'social work' interview

Enable ideas to emerge beyond the researchers questions

Encourage children and young people to lead activities

Join in and make activities more collaborative and open

Fight familiarity in the fieldwork

Have activities that are enjoyable

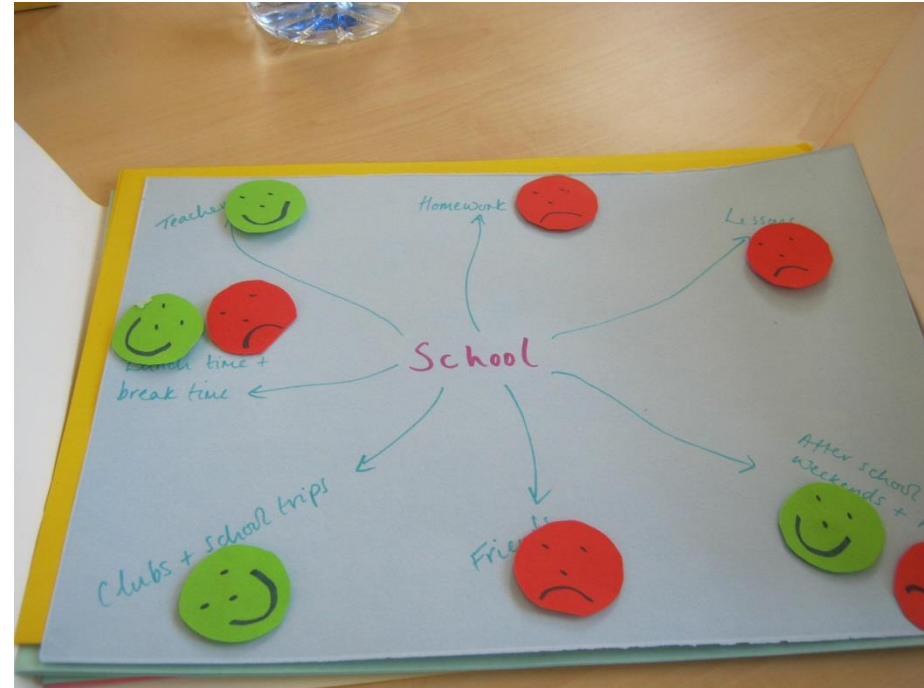


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Qualitative Participatory Methods



Peer researcher led focus groups



Key findings



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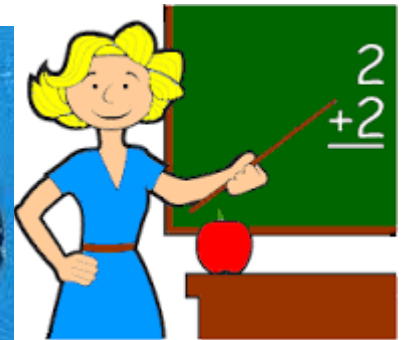
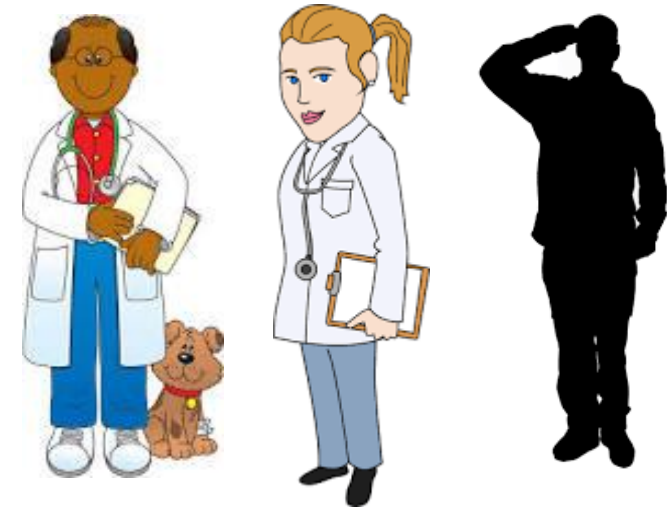
Aspirations

Did not lack aspiration

"I want to be an architect ... because I like art and most of my family are builders" (Male, age 12)

Often had altruistic aspirations and wanted to help others

"I want to work with kids in care when I'm older because I know what it's like and I've been through it most of my life. So I can actually be one of those people who turn around and say 'I understand', and actually do understand" (Female, 16+ group)



Aspirations –Barriers

“Various people to do with the care system were like ‘oh people in care don’t go to into higher education’. I wish social services would focus less on that because a lot of them have social work degrees so who are they to be telling anyone else that they’re not worthy of university? It’s like they don’t believe that children in care will do anything. And so if they don’t believe it, then how is anyone going to believe it about themselves?’ (Female, age 24)



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Aspirations – Enablers

“So she had a look at it with me and she said well I can do this by hand, so she sat down with me and helped me do my homework... So that member of staff sat down with me and said we can do your homework here and there” (Female, 16+ group)

“She [foster carer] put a lot of belief in me and she always told me that I could do it [go to university]” (Female, age 21)

My foster carer said I could make it if I try hard enough and I train hard enough and I do (Connor, age 13)

Every time my foster mother goes to a parents’ evening she’ll say, ‘I’m so proud of you’, because I’ve done really well in school and I’m trying my best so I can’t do any better than that (Gareth, age 13)



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Experiences – being ‘different’

‘Being made to feel like an outcast because I was in care... that made me feel alienated, frustrated, lonely and vulnerable’. (Male participant, 16+ group)

‘We don’t want people to be ‘looked after’, you want to be a normal kid too you know because it’s only one, its only label of you’ (Female participant, 16+ group)

‘I hate people feeling pity for me. I’m just a normal child, like...I’m in foster care, it doesn’t mean you’re just like some pity child’ (Male participant, 16+ group)



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Experiences – being ‘visible’

‘I don’t know bad bit was like the LAC Reviews and whatever because the teachers kind of knew that you were in care and whatever and that, they all were, people would be like, ‘oh why are you are going with Miss So-and-so?’ (Nadine, age 21)

‘I just didn’t want it, I was like I don’t need that, it’s singling me out and its making me seem special when I’m not, I’m a normal person’. (Female participant, 16+ group)

‘Any meetings, if they are necessary, should be held outside of school time, not just at a time that is convenient for the professionals’. (Female participant, 16+ group)



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Experiences – conflict in meetings

‘If you’re moved out of county then one county will argue with the other county about who pays for transport, who pays for the schooling, who pays for food, who pays for everything that has something to do with your education’ (Male Participant, 16+ group)

‘Councils are just like: ‘no that’s your problem, no that’s your problem, palming young people off sort of thing and it’s just really unpleasant’ (Male participant, 16+ group)

‘You know it shouldn’t have to be, ‘oh you’re paying for it, you’re paying for it’, you know? It’s a child, it’s a human being’ (Male participant, 16+ group)



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Experiences – ‘let off’ or ‘let down’

‘As soon as I went into care, then went back to school and my teachers majority of them treated me completely different, because I was in care they moved me down sets, they put me in special help, they gave me – put me in support groups. And I was just like I don’t need all this shit, I’ve only moved house, that’s it I was like yeah I might be in care but the only difference to me is I’ve moved house, that’s it... they looked at all my papers and where I was in my levels and that and they was like you’re more than capable of being in top set but we don’t think you’re going to be able to cope.’ (Female, 16+ group)

‘It’s about motivation. All you need is a good kick up the arse. And I think if somebody had given that to me when I was 16 or 17, I would probably have been like ‘right, that’s it I want to, I’m going to do something with my life’ (Male participant, 16+ group).

Unintended consequences –position of leniency was often well-intentioned, based on what is known about children and young people who are looked after and the difficulties they face.

But - teachers who they talked about as being best were those who encouraged them back into lessons/school, and pushed them academically, rather than allowing them to disengage with school work simply because of their ‘looked after’ status



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Recommendations

The final research report concluded with 17 recommendations...

Minimising disruption during school time

Universal programmes for support

Educational champions to resolve disputes

Access to computers and to a wide range of reading materials

Opportunities to meet with others who are looked

Training for foster carers



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Disseminating data creatively

- Accessibility
- Portability
- Multiple formats
- Impact
- Time
- Ethical re-representation



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Informing Policy



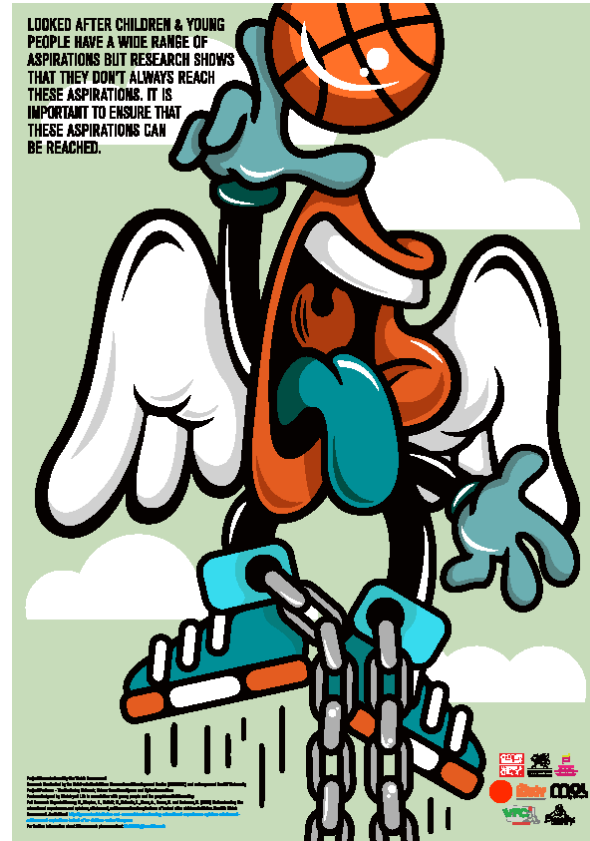
Outputs – please use and share

Short films x 4

Songs and music videos x 3;

Posters and postcards x 3

Thrive magazine



Impact and engagement award

- ESRC Impact Acceleration Account
- *Generate instrumental impact by extending the dissemination of findings to a wider policy and practitioner audience, whilst also generating conceptual impact by raising public interest and awareness of this concerning issue to keep it on the public and policy agenda; this will build more effective relationships and communications between individuals and agencies involved with children and young people.*



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Impact and engagement activities

- Educational charter
- 'Take a Break' magazine
- Poetry competition
- Artwork and music
- Workshops and events
(let us know if you would like us to do a talk/workshop)
(let us know if you have any suggestions)



Bombs and shields activity

- In groups reflect on how you can help your foster children and young people to have positive experiences of education
- What barriers and difficulties do you face – the bombs?
- What people and resources can you draw on to help – the shields?



Bombs and shields activity

- Reflections
- What points were raised?
- What do you think needs to change?
- What best practice advice can you share?



Any questions?



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