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TRANSFORMING PATHWAYS OUT OF CARE FOR 16/17 YEAR OLDS

AN EVALUATION REPORT FOR THE LGA CHILDREN'S EFFICIENCY PROJECT



**SCHOOL OF SPORT, EXERCISE AND
REHABILITATION SCIENCES**

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report represents the findings of the evaluation for the Transforming Pathways out of Care pilot project.

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Acronyms

The following acronyms were used throughout the report:

LGA – Local Government Association

MST4Life™ – My Strengths Training for Life (programme)

PIE – Psychologically Informed Environment

EET – Education, employment, or training

NEET – Not in education, employment, or training

YP – Young person/people

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Reference this document

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Reference to the literature review

Whiting, R. J., Quinton, M. L., & Cumming, J. (2019). Transitions out of care for looked after children with multiple and complex needs: A literature review. University of Birmingham, UK.

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TRANSFORMING PATHWAYS OUT OF CARE FOR 16/17 YEAR OLDS

Executive Summary

In accepting the External Challenge role for this project, we have undertaken an evaluation of the aims and objectives of the Children's Efficiency Project, whilst contributing to the council's wider agenda of providing social value.

An accompanying literature review provides an overview of the field and provides important context for the results found in this report.

We have collated findings from the evaluation of outcomes and process, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. A variety of viewpoints have been sought to provide a balanced view of the project, and to reflect the co-working considered central to these pathways.

Findings indicate a range of outcomes and risk profiles, overall positive experiences for staff and young people, and some engagement in education, employment and training activities. A number of factors, including staff training and approach and an appropriate social and physical environment, were identified as influencing outcomes.

Costs of the project were compared to costs incurred from previous placements. These calculations indicate that the project resulted in significant cost-savings for the Local Authority.

Limitations of the evaluation include inconsistent use of outcome measures, limited access to the experiences and data of young people who had moved on, and the small sample.

The findings from this evaluation are hoped to inform and influence the commissioning strategy for providing effective and efficient pathways out of care, and to form a basis for future evaluations.

Background

Recognising a need for an innovative and coordinated approach to providing accommodation and support to young people leaving care with high and/or multiple support needs (i.e., complex care leavers), Birmingham was the first authority to formally adopt and commission the Care Leaver Accommodation Framework developed by St Basils and Barnardo's in 2015[1].

The Local Government Association (LGA) funded a project to obtain transformational outcomes for complex care leavers whilst also reducing costs and ensuring value for money. The results of this project are intended to inform providers of commissioned supported housing on how to adapt their offer for this client group as well as to inform and improve joint commissioning and integrated services. The ultimate aim is to enhance the support provided to complex care leavers by providing an effective support system that can deliver cost effective outcomes[2].

The LGA-funded project consisted of three phases:

Phase 1: Birmingham City Council undertook a review of current areas of best practice and used this learning to inform a transformational supported accommodation offer that was then tested in Phase two.

Phase 2: 5 young people were placed in supported accommodation with St Basils Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE), providing a range of support and access to participation in the My Strengths Training for Life™ (MST4Life™) programme for developing mental skills and resilience.

Phase 3: The final phase involved evaluating this service delivery and making recommendations based on the lessons learnt to be undertaken by the External Challenge role.

[1] St. Basils & Barnardo's. (2015). The Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework.

[2] Mittal, A. (2016-2017). Complex care leavers: Developing a systematic pathway for identification, support and evaluation. Birmingham City Council.

Evaluation Aims and Scope of Report

In the External Challenge role, we conducted an outcome and process evaluation of Phase 2. The evaluation covers the period from when the young people moved into the accommodation offer until 1st June 2018.

Outcome evaluation

The aims of the outcome evaluation are to make conclusions on the extent to which the following outcomes were achieved:

For the Young Person:

1. Did the supported accommodation offer provide the young person with stability?
2. Did it provide them with the right support at the right time?
3. Did it enable their readiness for independence (e.g., resilience, self-worth, well-being)?

For the Local Authority and Shared Learning:

1. Did the project improve understanding of how to create transformational outcomes for young people with high/complex support needs leaving care?
2. Did the project result in efficiency savings for the Authority?
3. What evidence did the project produce to support implementing a holistic PIE approach?

Process evaluation

Following feedback and further analysis, the findings of this evaluation will be considered alongside the review conducted in Phase 1 and available academic literature to inform recommendations. The process evaluation is intended to provide insight into what aspects of the programme are effective and inform future improvements by:

1. Documenting and describing the programme activities (e.g., selection and recruitment, pre-tenancy support, tenancy in a PIE supported accommodation with access to support worker and MST4Life).
 2. Gaining the views of young people and the staff who support them.
 3. Reporting on young people's engagement with support and available opportunities for education, employment, training or other forms of meaningful activity (e.g., volunteering).
-

Evaluation Methods

We have used a mixture of methods to carry out the evaluation.

For example:

- **Support work tools:** To gain an understanding of the young people's strengths and support needs, we have examined Outcome Stars and Risk Trackers completed by support workers
- **EET outcomes:** To establish the outcomes achieved by the young people, we have accessed data collected by St Basils on their engagement with education, employment, training, and other forms of meaningful activity.
- **Interviews:** To gain a rich understanding of the views of those involved in the project, we have conducted interviews with the young people, support workers and managers of the supported accommodation project, and social workers/aftercare workers. The perspectives of heads of care services were sought but we were unable to secure their engagement in the evaluation.
- **MST4Life™ evaluation:** We have utilised unique access to data provided by the young people who participated in the MST4Life™ programme, including their attendance and engagement in sessions, their strengths profile, any diary room entries[1], and the reflections of the programme facilitators. This data is hoped to provide additional insights into the outcomes achieved by the young people.
- **Review of the literature:** A review of the academic and non-academic literature places the findings of our evaluation within this broader context. By doing so, we will be able to provide further evidence related to Birmingham's pioneering approaches to efficient and effective pathways out of care.

[1] Cooley, S. J., Holland, M. J., Cumming, J., Novakovic, E. G., & Burns, V. E. (2014). Introducing the use of a semi-structured video diary room to investigate students' learning experiences during an outdoor adventure education groupwork skills course. *Higher Education*, 67(1), 105-121.

Phase 2 of LGA – Children's Efficiency Project

The Young People

Five care leavers (2 female, 3 male) were provided with supported accommodation within St Basils. On admission, the young people were 16 (one YP), 17 (three YPs), or 18 (one YP). Four of the YPs recorded White as their ethnicity, and one identified as Mixed.

All were identified as having high or complex support needs (6+ risks) and requiring an expensive accommodation offer within the current framework. Young people came from different placements, with varying costs:

- Foster care = £700/week
- Residential care = £3000/week
- Other supported accommodation = £500/week

The Provider

St Basils is a Housing Service that supports young people aged 16 to 25 years who are homeless or at risk for homelessness in the West Midlands. They help offer a range of prevention, accommodation, and support services to give young adults stability and the opportunity to gain skills and achieve as they progress towards independence.

In 2011, St Basils became one of the first housing services to become a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE). To better meet the increasingly complex emotional and psychological needs and facilitate the development of mental skills of young people who are homeless or at risk, a PIE service puts relationships at the heart of their approach and provides staff with a consistent framework for understanding young people's behaviours and psychological tools for facilitating change.

The aim is to empower young people to help themselves to end vicious cycles of social exclusion and homelessness by becoming more competent and resilient as they progress towards independence and adulthood[1]. St Basils PIE also addresses the well-being of staff members through its focus on staff training and development, and regular reflective practice and/or access to case consultations led by a clinical psychologist.

The supported accommodation project for this programme was Conybere Gardens, a semi-independent project within St Basils located in Highgate, Birmingham with space for 36 young people (mixture of single, bedsits, and flats). Staff are on-site 24 hours/day and 7 days/week. Each young person is assigned a support worker as well as having access to a Boost worker to support their engagement with education, employment, and training[2].

[1] Cumming, J., Skeate, A., & Anderson, G. M. (2016). St Basils Psychologically Informed Environments: Meeting the emotional and psychological needs of homeless young people. London, UK: Housing Learning & Improvement Network. Retrieved from <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/St-Basils-Psychologically-Informed-Environments-meeting-the-emotional-and-psychological-needs-of-young-homeless-people/>

[2] St Basils – Conybere Gardens.

The Referral Process

Suitability for the programme was determined by initially screening paperwork and consulting with case workers to identify a potential cohort of 10 young people.

A new conversational approach to the referral process was used to place the young people in Conybere Gardens[1], including a conversation between social worker and provider and a meeting and visit by young person with the provider.

Compared to the normal referral process that has a poor focus on outcomes, providers are then able to view each young person as an individual with specific goals and aspirations. Prior to moving into the accommodation, conversations took place on how to work together to meet these goals, and risks were put into context (i.e., historic risks/events relating to behaviours) and discussed. Of the six care leavers who were offered a place within St Basils supported accommodation, five accepted and moved in between February 2017-April 2017.

[1] Kohli, K. & Kaur, M. (October, 2017). High Costs Packages – Support and Accommodation for 16/17 year olds. A presentation to the Local Government Association.

Results

Outcomes for the Young People

1. Did the supported accommodation offer provide the young person with stability?

After moving in between February 2017-April 2017, all five young people maintained their accommodation with St Basils for at least 6 months. The young people had been living with St Basils for an average of 352.2 days, ranging between 229 and 471 days.

As of 1st June 2018:

- YP1 and YP3 were still living with St Basils and still preparing to move on
- YP2 recently had a planned move into independent accommodation
- YP4 left St Basils to return to family (November 2017)
- YP5 moved into another accommodation offer (January 2018)

YP4 and YP5 were considered as having engaged less with St Basils staff and the support offered compared to those who stayed longer.

Risk Trackers and Outcome Stars

Risk trackers were used as support work tools to identify and track 10 areas of risk. Each of these areas received a green, amber, or red rating depending on the level of risk.

1. Risk to health
2. Risk of self-harm
3. Risk of suicide
4. Risk of abusing substances
5. Risk of debt and eviction
6. Risk to the place where you live
7. Risk of offending
8. Risk of abusing others
9. Risk to your children
10. Risk of abuse by others

Green = No risk

Amber = Risk, or concern but engaging

Red = Risk, or concern about future risk

The Homelessness **Outcomes Star** largely parallels the risk tracker items, although also includes broader non-risk items with more of a strengths-based approach. Each of these areas is rated on a 1 to 10 scale, with colour codes for interpretation

1. Motivation and taking responsibility
2. Self-care and living skills
3. Managing money and personal administration
4. Social networks and relationships
5. Drug and alcohol misuse
6. Physical health
7. Emotional and mental health
8. Meaningful use of time
9. Managing tenancy and accommodation
10. Offending

Stuck = 1-2

Accepting help = 3-4

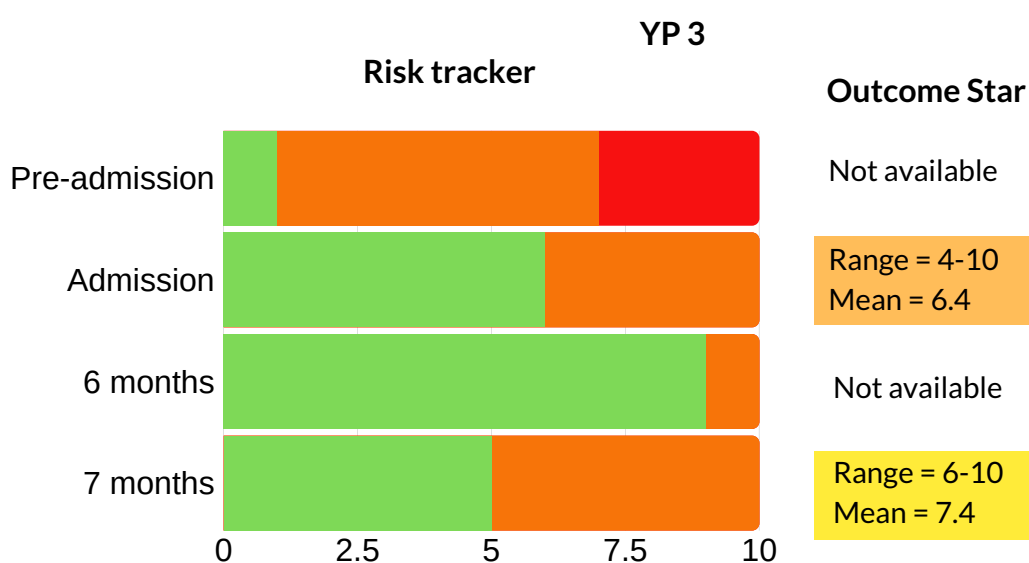
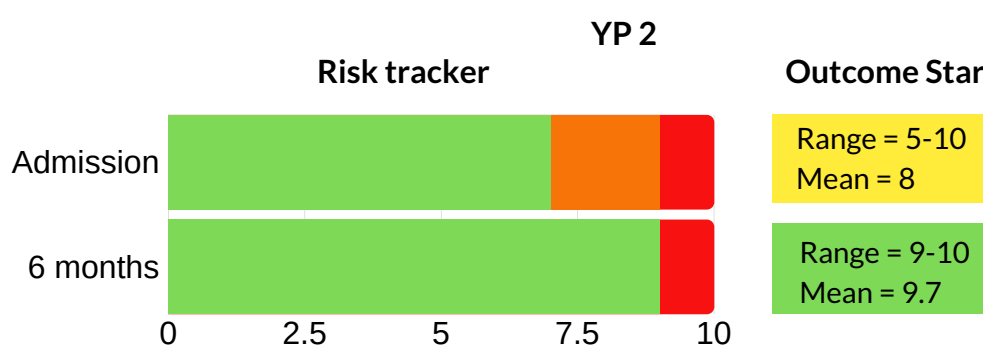
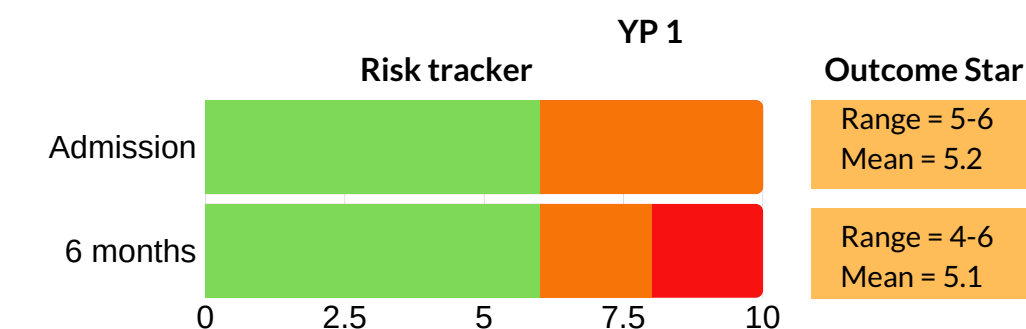
Believing = 5-6

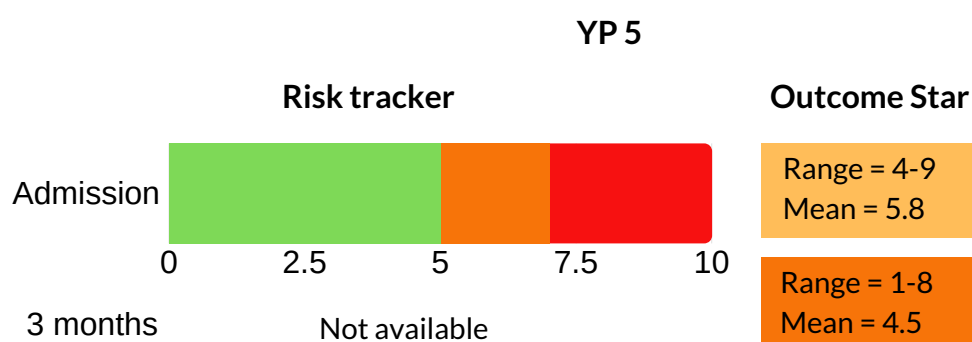
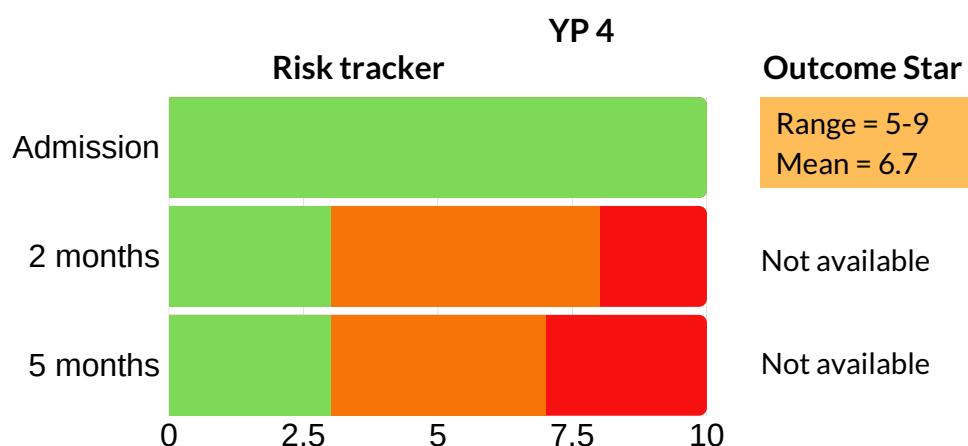
Learning = 7-8

Self-reliance = 9-10

The following charts present Outcome Star and Risk Tracker data for each young person.

For Risk Trackers, charts show the number of Risk Tracker items rated as Green, Amber or Red at various time points, colour coded to indicate risk level. (Any change or maintenance does not indicate change in any particular risk item. For example, a Red item at Time 2 may be a different risk item than a Red item at Time 1, yet the total number of Red items remains the same.)





The following, limited, conclusions can be made from these assessments:

YP 1 - Risk Tracker data suggest risk increased over time. However, Outcomes Star data suggests their progress was stable.

YP 2 - Experienced an improvement in outcomes and decrease in risk, supported by both Risk Tracker and Outcomes Star data.

YP 3 - Had the most data available. Multiple time points help show that their risk fluctuated over time, perhaps more accurately reflecting the vicissitudes often experienced by complex need care leavers. At the last assessment their risk level and outcomes indicated overall stability. The biggest reduction in risk occurred between pre-admission completion of the risk tracker and admission to St Basils. It is uncertain what was responsible for the reduction, but could potentially include any support that was offered to the young person as they were preparing for transition.

YP 4 and 5 - An escalation in risk ratings was particularly apparent for YP4, but had no supporting Outcome Star data. YP 5 appeared to experience a small reduction in positive outcomes, but had no supporting Risk Tracker data.

Several general observations can be made about the Risk Trackers and Outcomes Stars:

- Staff completed risk trackers with the involvement of care leavers seven out of eight times when this was documented, which suggests collaborative working.
- There was inconsistency in when assessments were made, and whether only or both Risk Trackers and Outcomes Stars were available. This may reflect inconsistent documentation or use of the tools.
- Results from Risk Trackers and Outcomes Stars in the same period were sometimes contradictory.
- The data provide an incomplete view of the young people's stability over time, which would require more frequent assessment. More frequent collection of outcomes data may better represent their overall progress and take into account the ups and downs often experienced by this group.
- For better understanding of these results, the risk and outcomes trajectories would have to be compared to trajectories expected for young people progressing through 'service as usual' pathways.

Risk and outcomes in context

As this last point suggests, the findings of the Risk Trackers and Outcome Stars require context. In the accompanying literature review[1], it was found that young people leaving care, particularly those with multiple and complex needs, are at higher risk of instability, with higher rates of homelessness and unemployment, and poor physical and mental health within the first 24 months of leaving.

As an example, one mixed methods study of 51 youth experiencing homelessness found that before achieving stability, they first went through stages of instability and demoralisation[2]. Progression through these stages was found to take "considerably longer than 1 year" and consisted of "setbacks, individual and systemic challenges, and trauma". Therefore, some level of instability would be expected in this sample of young people, particularly across this time frame.

For example, for the two young people (YP 4 & 5) who left the placement before the evaluation began, there is little contextual qualitative data regarding their progress. In particular, YP 4 seemed to experience a dramatic increase in risk. However, without supporting or contextual data, it is difficult to ascertain whether, for example, the admission assessment was correct, or what accounted for the sudden deterioration.

Furthermore, where qualitative data is available, the findings from interviews with the care leavers, support staff and social workers, which are discussed further in the following sections, reveal more complexity than indicated by the above Risk Tracker and Outcome Star data. The authors of the aforementioned study anticipate these findings in their conclusion that the challenges faced by homeless youth were "addressed through a persistent effort facilitated by youth resilience and key supports" (p. 207).

[1] Whiting, R. J., & Cumming, J. (2018). Achieving transformational outcomes for multiple and complex need care leavers: A literature review. University of Birmingham, UK.

[2] Kidd, S. A., Frederick, T., Karabanow, J., Hughes, J., Naylor, T., & Barbic, S. (2016). A mixed methods study of recently homeless youth efforts to sustain housing and stability. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33(3), 207-218.

Qualitative findings on risk, outcomes and stability

The following findings suggest that the numerical data presented above does not provide a complete picture of the care leavers' experience of the programme. Thematic maps constructed from interview data referred throughout this report can be found in the Appendix.

In general, the young people were identified as being calmer and more stable in terms of temperament and their ability to cope emotionally. About this improvement one young person commented:

"If you look at how I used to live and then look at how I live now, you'd be shocked." – Young person

However, thoughts on the possible futures of those still accommodated at the project differed substantially. For one young person, there seemed to be no doubts as to their stability and probability of future success.

"She'd been there long enough to see that the placement was in her interests, it was working towards the goals that she wanted. It had been quite stable and settled." – Residential project manager

"She's actually managed the home really well and so made a very comfortable environment while she was there" – Social worker

Conversely, for another young person, one aftercare worker was convinced that they would be unable to engage in services.

"If you're in a placement such as [this] one... your antisocial behaviours are being tolerated, and still you can't adhere [to rules and guidelines], I don't see how you can function anywhere else because I don't think anywhere else is going to put up with that kind of behaviour." – Aftercare worker

Regardless of this concern, they saw the placement as the best move for him because he was not ready for an independent tenancy.

"For me, the programme... was ideal for him because he was not in a position where he could take on his own tenancy... This programme should be made available to more young people, because quite a few of our young people are adult age but not adult mentality to take on the responsibility of their own tenancy." – Aftercare worker

2. Did the supported accommodation offer provide young people with the right support at the right time?

Apprehensions in the transition period

The literature review[1] accompanying this report identified numerous aspects of transitioning from care that might be difficult for a young person. The experiences of the care leavers in this programme reflected these challenges, such as navigating and building social networks, dealing with an abrupt transition, and general anxieties about making another placement move. These apprehensions are understandable and well-documented.

“The worst thing is the people. It’s just everybody [has] different personalities because there’s 36 other people living here” – Young person

“There was not time really [to prepare]... because I had to move really quickly from the foster placement” – Young person

“I wasn’t very open to people about myself, and I didn’t really show myself very much.” – Young person

Staff relationships and support

Relationships between young people and St Basils staff were overall highly positive. The development and experience of positive relationships within the PIE framework was identified as a strongly enabling process and crucial to any positive outcomes.

Young people described the staff as people they could talk to, both in terms of being listened to non-judgementally and receiving practical advice or help.

“It’s nice to have someone there that you know you can speak to and they won’t judge you” – Young person

“The relationship was brilliant. They were very understanding... of his behaviour. He is not the easiest person to be around, he can be very aggressive, but they were very supportive of him.” – Aftercare worker

“If I feel low and I need to have a talk with them, the office is always open 24/7... They do say to come and speak to the night staff if you can’t sleep and your head is not feeling okay.” – Young Person

[1] Whiting, R. J., & Cumming, J. (2018). Achieving transformational outcomes for multiple and complex need care leavers: A literature review. University of Birmingham, UK.

The “staff’s understanding of the problem of the young people and the willingness to accommodate poor behaviour and... give chances to rectify his behaviour” were considered by one aftercare worker to be one of the best features of the programme.

This experience of support was contrasted with their lack of such relationships whilst in care.

“I did not have relationships with the staff in the care system. This is probably the first ever staff team I’ve ever actually fully, like, sat down... with.” – Young person

Individual nature of support

Once relationships were developed, staff were able to support the young people and manage any difficulties they may have presented with. Furthermore, the nature of the support received varied between young people, depending on their needs. For example, YP5 who left St Basils to live in another supported accommodation had presented with challenging behaviour throughout his stay. Whilst no longer able to support him, staff still regarded his move as a success because it enabled him to live closer to family. His support worker explained that without the service provision at this time, the young person may not have had the space he needed to make this decision.

“That was... definitely positive, that wouldn’t have happened if he wasn’t here... Because they had that bit of space from each other, a bit of time, so that’s what he wanted to do, and we supported that.” – Support worker of YP5

Managing challenging behaviour

Perspectives from the different stakeholders seemed to converge to support the idea that residential staff were skilled at de-escalating behaviours whilst maintaining and even strengthening relationships with the young person.

“I go into the office fuming and within a minute I’m not angry. They’ve calmed me down, but do it in a way like there’s no need to do that... put it in a context that you will understand” – Young person

The staff’s relationship with young people was also seen to involve appropriate boundaries, a key part of the PIE relationship-centered ethos. The following example shows how these boundaries were sometimes tested by residents, and the bounded response from staff reinforced trust.

“Let’s say I’ll ask something about another resident, they will just say it’s confidential. I’m not expecting an answer, I’m just joking about, but it’s nice to know that your information is kept secret.” – Young person

Strengths-based approach

The good relationships between young people and residential staff, identified by all parties, may be partly attributable to the strengths-based approach staff seemed to take. This PIE approach differed from young people's previous placements because:

"...the start of the relationship was very positive, and it was more recognising what she could do for herself... It's strengths-based rather than weakness-based, which is what the other relationship had generated into... I think that helped her as well because she could see how much she was already achieving." – Social worker

"You meet the young people behind the risks, and... I'm not saying they're not without problems, but they're young people who just need support" – Residential project manager

3. Did the supported accommodation offer enable young people's readiness for independence?

For the purposes of the outcome evaluation, readiness for independence was defined as:

1. Increased engagement in meaningful opportunities for education, work, and training (EET) and improved life skills
2. Increased well-being

Engagement in EET

At the point of admissions, 3 of the 5 young people were NEET and the other two were in education. Throughout their time living with St Basils, all 5 young people engaged in meaningful activity but to varying degrees.

At exit from St Basils or at the end of the evaluation, one young person was regarded as EET, one as NEET, two as NEET and taking action, and one as NEET but expecting a child.

- **YP1 and YP3** were initially NEET and made progress towards becoming EET by taking courses offered by St Basils including a life skills award accredited by the Open College Network West Midlands (OCNWM) and MST4Life™ programme. In the case of **YP3**, he also went on job interviews and held a catering job for two months.
- **YP2 and YP5** were initially in education when they first started living with St Basils. **YP2** successfully completed her A/S levels whilst also holding a part-time job. She started A-levels, but left education because she is expecting her first child. She plans to return to education once her child is born. **YP5** fell out of education after being suspended by his school for challenging behaviour.
- **YP4** found work in a café while living with St Basils.

The following displays the EET status of each young person throughout the project.

Care Leaver	EET status at admission	EET + 6 months admission	Current/exit EET status
YP 1	NEET Not engaging	NEET Taking action	NEET Taking action Engaged in several courses, completed St Basils life skills award and MST4Life™ programme.
YP 2	EET F/T Education (A/S Levels) & P/T Employment	EET F/T Education (starting A-Levels)	NEET Is expecting first child and would like to re-commence education once child has been born. Completed MST4Life™ programme
YP 3	NEET Contemplating taking action	NEET Taking action	NEET Taking action Held a job for 2 months. Currently interviewing for a new job. Completed MST4Life™ programme
YP 4	NEET	EET	EET
YP 5	EET Engaging in school	NEET Excluded from school for being abusive to staff	NEET

For young people who were NEET at the point of moving into St Basils, a focus was to prepare them for engaging in learning, skills, and work opportunities. This included taking pre-vocational courses accredited by the Open College Network West Midlands (OCNWM) and contributing towards a Level 1 Award in Progression (St Basils Life Skills Award). Young people choose three modules from a range of core modules, which include career preparation, job seeking skills, personal budgeting and managing money, and time management. Young people take part in an annual St Basils Life Skills graduation event to celebrate their success.

Other EET-related achievements were also mentioned:

“Within the past 2-3 months I’ve been making movements, within myself and that. I’ve received a music award” – Young person

In general, the opportunities to engage in education, employment and training were seen as sufficient.

**“As far as I’m concerned he was given as much support as he could get because he had people on board who were helping him get into education, employment or training.”
– Aftercare worker**

However, it was remarked by both residential manager and aftercare worker that engagement in these opportunities was often inconsistent:

“You give him a course, he does it for a couple of days and then he goes off... they find work for him or training, he’d go for a while and then stop.” – Aftercare worker

“[One YP] had a couple of jobs since he’s been here, he’s lasted two weeks, he’s not seen it through to the end. [Another YP] has had a couple of jobs; [Another YP] was at college, she stop-started, stop-started.” Residential project manager

MST4Life

Three young people participated in the MST4Life™ programme[1]. This involved a 6-session programme followed by a 4-day outdoor activity residential in the Lake District (Raymond Priestley Centre, Coniston Waters). The programme demands a hands-on approach from participants, so they learn to recognise and further evolve their mental skills and strengths in progressive personal and group challenges. The challenges and activities include structured reflections that facilitate the development as well as the implementation of skills that help with self-regulation, coping with stress, and interpersonal relations.

Ratings by programme facilitators indicated that all three engaged well in sessions and had excellent attendance rates. Participation in the MST4Life™ programme also contributes up to two modules towards the Life Skills Award.

[1] Cumming, J. & Anderson, G. M. (2016). The Mental Skills Training for Life programme for homeless young people. London, UK: Housing Learning & Improvement Network. Retrieved from <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/The-Mental-Skills-Training-for-Life-programme-for-Homeless-Young-People/>

The MST4Life™ programme was described positively by participants, particularly the residential component. One participant of the programme described how it helped them engage with something they were passionate about:

“I love that lifestyle. I love to be outdoors... us being boys, [we] blasted it.” – Young person

Life Skills

The St Basils offer to support progression into independent living, including a life skills programme, was valued by the different stakeholders. For some, it was important and helped them develop independent living skills to cope with the St Basils residency and beyond.

“They're helping me become an adult, they're helping me become a person that can look after his flat.” – Young person

“She has shown that she can manage the aspects of the tenancy really well...and so made a very comfortable environment while she was there.” – Social worker

An aftercare worker commented that the St Basils offer was excellent, partly because of its life skills programme.

“There's a life skills programme... you can't want for more than that”- After care worker

However, for one young person, completing the Award seemed to be a tick-box exercise rather than helping her learn new skills:

“It was easy because I already knew what to put, but I didn't think it benefited me really because I already had the skills.” – Young person

Nevertheless, this young person may have benefited from the accredited status of the Award, which could act as a contributor to further EET engagement.

Living at St Basils seemed to come with the recognition of how important for them being hosted at the placement had been.

“If they threw me from a care home into a flat I would have broken down months ago and I would have been homeless now. They should offer this to everybody...” – Young person

They also expressed a desire to move on, for example:

“I’m going to my own flat and doing it properly, because I can’t live here forever. Nobody can.” – Young person

“There are little things that make it home, but I’d like to live somewhere else ... Even though I love the staff, I’d love to wake up and not for them to be there you know what I mean?” – Young person

These factors relate to an idea mentioned in the literature review accompanying this report: that the needs of complex care leavers go beyond acquiring skills and engaging in meaningful EET opportunities. EET is supported, for example, by physical, mental and social wellbeing, and feeling confident and supported to deal with the challenges of life.

Wellbeing and Other Outcomes

Self-confidence

Personal confidence was one of the changes observed in at least one of the young people whilst living at St Basils.

“I’ve become more confident because back then I didn’t want to move out, I was too scared. But now I’m actually doing it. I’ve kind of forced myself to go out there and instead of hiding away in my little St Basils room.” – Young person

This was achieved, for example, through practices that support a young person’s sense of self-direction and self-reliance.

“[We say:] ‘You’ve got it, you do what you think is best’. If it doesn’t work out we’ll decipher it afterwards and work out what happened, but rather than doing something for her I like to give her the choice and then she does it of her own accord” – Support worker

Relationships and prosocial behaviours

There was a sense that being at St Basils promoted a sense of community. The care leavers were observed to have more difficulty shortly after transition, and then gradually settled in.

“By the time I saw her after the Easter holidays she was more relaxed, she’d got to know some of the staff members, she blossomed from there to actually becoming an active member of St Basil’s and she became one of the reps” – Social worker

For the Local Authority and Shared Learning:

1. Did the project improve understanding of how to create transformational outcomes for young people with high/complex support needs leaving care?

There were a number of insights derived from the project that could improve understanding of best practice in this area, some of which are evidenced below.

Integrated support networks

The relationship between St Basils and social work staff was highly regarded by both partners and considered an important part of the successes of the programme.

“The staff were really good as well because I talked to her and then I talked to them, and we kind of work it out all between us.” - Social worker

“It didn’t really matter who I spoke to, they were all very knowledgeable about her. And if there was something that needed to be done, there was always a way to sort it out.” - Social worker

There was the sense that social workers, alongside fulfilling their obligations as corporate parents, assisted support staff in working with the young people. As young people gained independence in their new placement, social workers could gradually withdraw their support.

St Basils staff also provided social workers with updates to aid their work with the young people, highlighting the effectiveness and efficiency of good communication. Support workers were also more able to conduct individualised work with the care leavers which could be fed back to social workers.

“We have more time to implement certain PIE techniques and then feedback to the social worker... so that social worker is a bit more prepared then for when they meet the young person” - Support worker

Stepping stones

There was recognition of this placement as a suitable place for supporting the transition from care. Young people practiced being semi-independent, with the concomitant balance between a high level of staff support and the ability to come and go. The approach worked best for those who were already engaging.

“The level of support for young people who have got that slightly positive edge that they’re engaging with education or training or something like that, but just need that little bit of extra confidence or support with their own emotional health is absolutely perfect. The model is just right.” - Social worker

“If they want to transition into going into a flat then I think they should have this opportunity to prove if they can... There are some people that have moved from a care home into a flat and they’re brought down really and truly because they didn’t know how to... I look at this as my step back before I step forward” – Young person

Similarly, the placement was described as providing a safety net. Rules and expectations were applied but were flexible and came with an understanding of a young person’s difficulties to prevent further exclusion.

“But I think, when you move into a flat by yourself, you don’t really have those people. But they’re still here, you can still call them [St Basils staff) and ask them and that’s what I think is so like great about this flat.” – Young person

“When it comes to putting up with things they take a lot of shit off of us. They’ve took shit off me, I’ve been in the office ranting and raving, made threats to members of staff personally, one, just out of anger... But when I spoke to them the next day and said ‘yo big man’ [laughs] ... for example, ‘I didn’t mean to do what I did’. And he broke it down to me and was like yeah that’s fine, because he understood why I was angry.” – Young person

Physical and social environment

The physical and social environment, one of the key aspects of PIE, was identified as an important facilitator in young people settling into the accommodation. Having a safe and appealing place to live that felt like a home, and having their own space was important to the care leavers.

“The staff are very presentable and happy, and you could tell that it was a good environment to be in... The flats aren’t all that bad, they’re furnished, and they’re not tiny so you’ve got your own space.” – Young person

“I will sit on that grass... I love it because... [it’s] got a communal area.” – Young person

“It’s very important to set a precedent and set a tone for the young people to understand that this is their home” – Residential project manager

“It felt safe, which was important” – Social worker

Staff training, reflective practice, and resilience

As a consistent theme in the interviews, this aspect of the programme, integral to a functioning PIE organisation, was likely to be an influential factor in enabling positive outcomes.

PIE training was seen as not only helpful in relating with young people but also with other professionals so that when challenges are encountered, they do not escalate to eviction.

“The skills from PIE are very transferable in dealing with young people, but also in dealing with professionals and being open, saying we could potentially be at the point of eviction... [figuring out] what they [social/aftercare workers] are going to do, what we’re going to do and formulate a plan to ensure that the young person maintains the tenancy.” – Residential project manager

Reflective practice, engaged in by PIE-trained St Basils front line staff and management and supervised by a clinical psychologist, was perceived as useful in 'unloading', practising self-care, developing greater understanding of the challenges involved in working with this group and how to help support them through these challenges.

"that little time there with [the clinical psychologist] is like a breath of fresh air." – Support worker

"It's a good way of offloading and its very beneficial for the staff because the staff need to be looked after as well" – Provider manager

With this understanding, support staff, social workers and young people all supported the expansion of the programme to be available to other young people leaving care.

"A programme like this is ideal for those young people, because you know they just wouldn't maintain those tenancies as it would just break down." – Social worker

"They should have more programmes like this. It's needed." – Support worker

St Basils staff noted how they were able to tolerate and work through anti-social and other difficult behaviours, which ultimately helped the young people maintain their residency. Therefore, supportive practices for front-line workers seemed to play a crucial role.

In the case of St Basils, this resilience seems to have come from an understanding of the reasons behind difficult behaviour (a psychologically and trauma-informed approach), reflective practice groups and case consultations (supported by a clinical psychologist), and use of psychological tools.

However, when asked how the model could be applied to other providers, one after care worker said:

"It can't. I honestly don't think other providers would be willing to put up with it [the behaviour]." – Aftercare worker

This suggests that, if the programme were to be implemented elsewhere, providers would have to incorporate similar staff training and support. Staff perceived competence and wellbeing may also increase. This view was supported by the manager of the programme who discussed how staff learnt from the pilot.

"I think [housing the pilot] has been quite beneficial to us. It's strengthened us as a staff team. It's developed our skills. It's developed our resilience. Actually, we realise we're really good at this, and we are good at supporting and nurturing young people" – Residential project manager

The high staff motivation, tolerance and support given to the care leavers in this programme were noted to be exceptional. The prospect of this offer being the care leavers' "last chance" might have been one reason for these factors.

"They can't leave here evicted, they can't... The care leavers could have been evicted six months ago: kicking, ripping doors off, windows, smashing furniture up, but we haven't evicted them because we have to make it work"- Support worker

"I want to make it work even more with the care leavers" – Support worker

When considering further implementation of the programme, the extra effort dedicated to this project by staff was likely to have been a factor in maintaining the tenancy, producing positive outcomes, and preventing negative outcomes.

2. Did the project result in efficiency savings for the Authority?

Reducing the high cost nature of the current framework used for placing care leavers in supported accommodation was part of the rationale for the pilot project. In Phase 1 of the project, Birmingham City Council undertook a review of over 80 referrals of 16/17 years olds to better understand what drives placement costs to increase. They found^[1]:

- Young people who had a high number of risks were accommodated in higher cost placements
- No evidence of reduction in risks
- Young people did not see outcomes being achieved in these higher cost placements. No correlation between good outcomes and high cost placements.
- 80% of reviewed cases found risks to increase with time and this saw a correlation with placement moves and an increase in placement cost. Placement moves ranged from 3 – 17.

[1] Kohli, K. & Kaur, M. (October, 2017). High Costs Packages – Support and Accommodation for 16/17 year olds. A presentation to the Local Government Association.

The following table compares the cost of the St Basils placement compared to previous placements[1]. These amounts show combined costs for all 5 young people[2].

Reviewing these costs, Birmingham City Council found the model tested by the pilot project resulted in significant savings.

	Combined cost of previous placements	Combined cost of St Basils supported accommodation*
Weekly cost	£7,138	£998.05
Costs over 52 weeks	£371,176	£61,898.60

One-year costs savings = **£309,277.40**

*Note: Includes costs of training staff in PIE (£1000/staff member for 3 days of Foundation Training and 12 months of monthly reflective practice) is included in the St Basils placement costs at £199.60 per young person per week. Also includes costs association with the MST4Life™ programme (£2000/young person).

[1] Kohli, K. & Kaur, M. (October, 2017). High Costs Packages – Support and Accommodation for 16/17 year olds. A presentation to the Local Government Association.

[2] However, as mentioned, not all 5 young people stayed in the St Basils placement for 52 weeks. Therefore, costs would differ depending on subsequent placement.

Best practice recommendations

Outcomes for the Young People

The findings from this evaluation, which includes the voices of residential support staff, social services staff, and young people themselves, indicate that this pathway out of care aligns with the key principles of the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework[1]:

- Giving information, choice and control
- Giving space to young people to make mistakes
- Provision of supportive and unconditional relationships
- Helping young people succeed
- Offering flexible support that adapts to meet their needs
- Sharing responsibility of the corporate parent role

In concluding, we can consider the final question 3 for the local authority and shared learning: 'What evidence did the project produce to support implementing a holistic PIE approach?' This question can be answered with insights into the process of transition out of care, including for the care leavers who undertook this pathway, and best practice in supporting care leavers in their transition. These insights may be considered in conjunction with recommendations presented in the accompanying literature review[2], including the Transitional Housing Checklist tool which aims to guide discussions with care leavers about their progression planning and help with assessing the appropriateness of transitional housing placements.

Embedding PIE

- **Tolerance.** Due to the nature of the programme, staff may have been more tolerant toward challenging or destructive behaviour than usual. This fact presents a challenge to other providers who wish to engage this group. In the process of developing quality relationships with young people, boundaries may be naturally pushed. Service providers must consider how they will deal with risk behaviours, whilst implementing a strengths-based approach which does not lead to further exclusion.
- **Not a quick fix.** Staff had time to develop new ways of thinking and become confident in implementing PIE tools. This learning includes training opportunities and engagement in reflective practice. Developing trusting relationships with young people also takes time.
- **Time and headspace.** Success may partly depend on staff having time to dedicate to developing these relationships and work through difficulties. Staff from other organisations such as social services also require time to liaise with residential support staff and their young person. These reflections also highlight the importance of manageable caseloads.

Staff support and training

One key component of the PIE model implemented by St Basils is that of staff support which is achieved through trauma-informed training, psychological support tools, and continuing reflective practice.

- **Understanding.** Inseparable from the need for tolerance when embedding PIE, mentioned above, is the need for staff to understand the behaviours displayed by complex need care leavers. This understanding, developed through PIE training and reflective practice, seemed to depersonalise the challenging behaviours with which they were confronted.
- **Reflective practice.** Led by a clinical psychologist, staff saw reflective practice sessions as a time to 'decompress', take a step back from the challenges they faced, and develop formulations to understand and manage those challenges.

[1] Barndardo's (2015). Care leavers accommodation and support framework.

[2] Whiting, R. J., & Cumming, J. (2018). Achieving transformational outcomes for multiple and complex need care leavers: A literature review. University of Birmingham, UK.

Relationships

Reflecting the St Basils PIE model, positive relationships featured heavily in the reflections from all those interviewed and could be linked to the care leavers' feelings of being supported, improved reflective abilities, increasing confidence and calmer temperaments.

- **With the young people.** Young people and staff appeared to develop open, trusting and understanding relationships.
- **Co-working.** Despite the limitations of high caseloads, partnership working between St Basils staff and social workers were helpful, positive, complementary, and open.
- **Positive experiences.** All those who were interviewed for this evaluation viewed the programme positively. The overall positive experience of the young people, often in contrast to their experiences in care, could provide them with a base to develop positive relationships with services, employers, and other personal relationships in future.

Support toward independence

Whilst some maintained their residency at St Basils, others moved to other appropriate accommodation.

Psychological theories informing PIE, as well as government agencies, commissioners, care services and other organisations such as St Basils that support young people leaving care, understand the importance of moving away from dependence on services and towards independence alongside interdependence within a social network. On balance, this pilot seemed to show care leavers move toward the aim of independence.

- **Depending less on care services.** Care leavers were supported to depend less on the support of social services after transitioning into St Basils' accommodation.
- **Learning skills.** More independent ways of living were learned, particularly by those who had transitioned from residential care settings. Alongside practical living skills, psychosocial skills were also learned, for example, by young people who engaged with the MST4Life programme.
- **Employment, education and training.** Engagement in EET was evident, including periods of employment and completion of Life Skills and MST4Life programmes offered by St Basils, although engagement was inconsistent.
- **Risk and outcome markers.** Data showed a mix of decrease, fluctuation and increase in risk and independence markers. The unique aspects of each case, limited and inconsistent data from these tools, and the lack of a control group against which to compare findings mean it is difficult to interpret these data.

Evaluation: limitations and next steps

It is difficult to make concrete conclusions about the efficacy of the programme due to limitations of the evaluation. The following recommendations are made to overcome these limitations and ensure better evaluation in the future:

- A **larger sample** of care leavers going through the pathway
- Inclusion of a **comparison** group going through a 'service as usual' pathway
- More **consistent use or reporting of assessment tools** such as Outcome Stars
- Processes to facilitate ascertaining the views of **participants who leave services early** to ensure a balanced array of experiences are reported.

As a result of conducting this evaluation and literature review, there are several questions we recommend service providers, commissioners and researchers continue to explore, including:

- How can unique support be implemented similar to or beyond the individualisation implemented in this pilot?
- How can multi-agency working, which seemed to be a success in this project, be made more efficient, inclusive, and incorporated into future service provision?
- How could this approach be tested with larger numbers to make firmer conclusions about its effectiveness and feasibility?
- How could this approach be tested in other housing services? What training and support would they need?

This evaluation has provided a base upon which to explore these questions. It also recognises the importance of both quantitative and qualitative methods for providing quality and contextualised evidence when attempting to answer complex questions.

Conclusion

There are gaps in achieving successful outcomes for multiple and complex need care leavers.

This small scale pilot suggests that a step-down approach for independent living in supported accommodation that offers a psychologically informed environment and opportunities to engage may be suitable for care leavers with moderate to high needs.

The pathway also offers a cost-effective alternative to higher cost placements for care leavers who are able to cope living semi-independently when staff receive training to develop and maintain trusting relationships and understand the reasons behind challenging behaviour that might present itself.

The literature indicates a pattern of higher risk of a number of negative consequences for young people with multiple support needs leaving care. Findings from the pilot suggest that these risks can be mitigated in a supportive environment.

Young people in such a position can achieve positive outcomes such as moving on to an independent tenancy, or at least maintaining their current tenancy and continue engaging positively with service staff.