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Children's Social Care
Research and Development Centre

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What have we learnt from looked after children in Wales? Reflecting on their views about educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations

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Christchurch Centre, Newport

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Project overview

This was an in depth qualitative study into the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children and young people 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

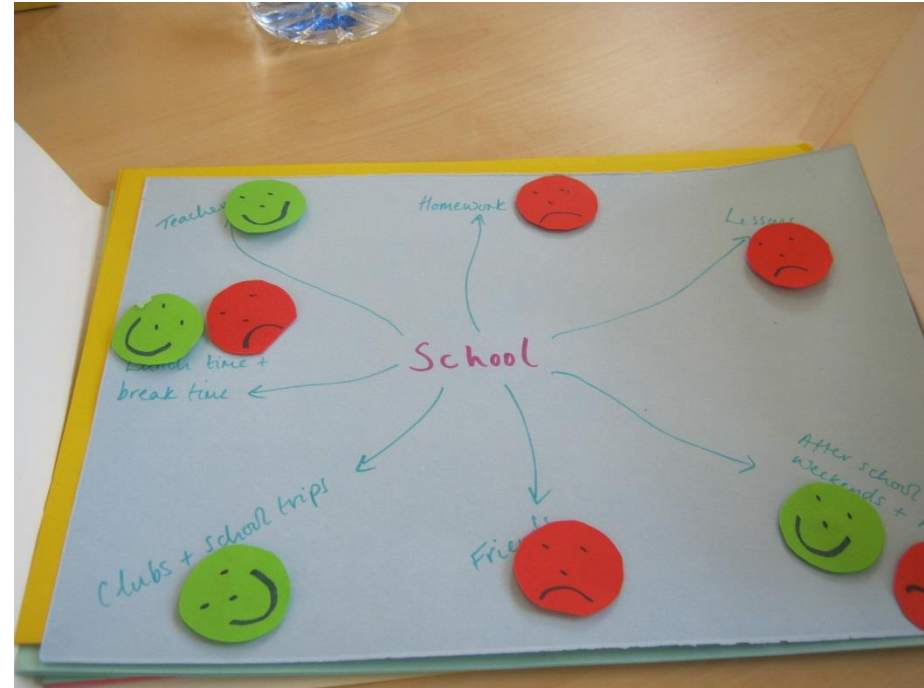


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Qualitative Participatory Methods



Key findings



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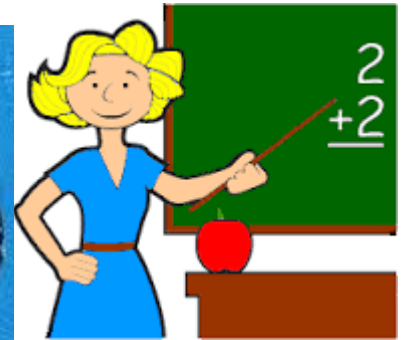
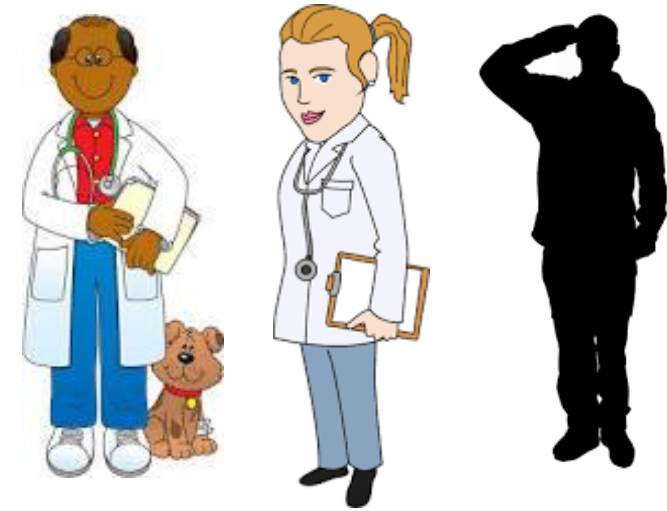
Aspirations

LACYF did not lack aspiration

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

LACYF 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 – Enablers and Barriers

*“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)*

“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)

“Various foster carers and 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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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 LACYP 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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Experiences – foster carers

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

My foster carers help me with my homework. They're nice (Jack, age 9)

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)

It's being a normal parent really isn't it? It's what they basically are. If you had children you would sit down with them and help them with their homework so why can't foster carers? (Female participant, 16+ group)

You kind of hope that the foster carer at least has the reading and maths skills of a 7 year old. You've got to hope that they've at least got those skills... (Male participant, 16+ group).

To become a foster carer obviously you would have had to like go to school and go to like college or something...surely? (Female participant, 16+ group)

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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Informing Policy



Feedback from Practitioners

Independent Reviewing Officer: "I will NOT hold LAC reviews during school hours as children have feedback that this is unsettling and upsetting"

LACE support team: "more drive and determination to support the rights of looked after children in education"

Youth Offending Service: "help to make sure my organisation does not make appointments for young people in school time"

Independent Reviewing Officer: "Children feeling different within school due to their LAC status needs to be challenged as low expectations will have a long term negative impact upon self esteem and aspirations"

Senior Policy Researcher: *Just really excellent research - very important, very creative and very powerful*



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Feedback from Young People

'The one thing that I will take back home is the experience that we have had today and it's been a good experience. Also it's a pleasure to have the invite to come and be part of the company and make a success of myself'

'Not to let people tell me I'm different and that I can't achieve anything because I can achieve what I want in life as long as I work for it'

'Being able to see that there are people out there who care about Looked After children's welfare'

'Giving my social worker leaflets to read'

'Events like this can make young peoples futures better'



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Outputs – please use and share

Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., Evans, R. and Andrews, D. 2015. *Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

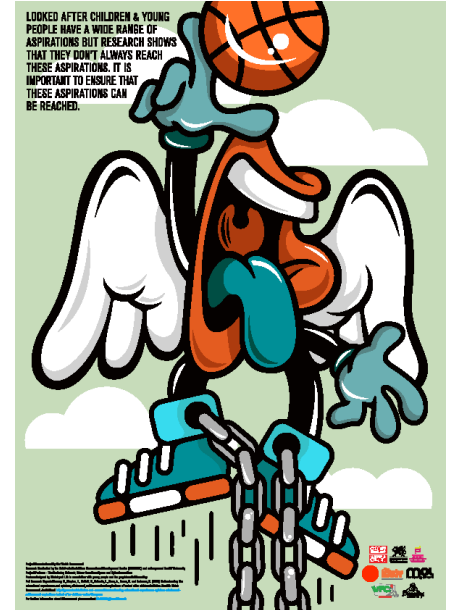
Short films x 4

Songs and music videos x 3; Posters and postcards x 3

Thrive magazine

Available at: <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/looked-after-children-and-education/>

Showing of music video – Breathe by Sapien



For more information on CASCADE's work:

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Activity and Workshop Feedback

Bombs and Shields Activity

Bombs and Shields for LACYP

Bombs and Shields for you?

Feedback cards

