

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Submission to the Department for Education's 'Children's home workforce: call for evidence'

August 2019

Become is the charity for children in care and young care leavers. We provide help, support, and advice to make sure care-experienced young people can unleash their potential and take control of their lives. We help make the care system work better by ensuring that young people's voices and perspectives shape policy and service provision. Until November 2016, Become was known as The Who Cares? Trust.

Introduction

Become welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence to the Department for Education's call for evidence on the children's home workforce.

Given Become's role, we responded to the questions most relevant to children in care, drawing on what young people with experience of residential care tell us about their experiences to argue for changes which will make a difference to the quality of care they receive. Our submission includes particular reference to previous engagement work carried out with young people on children's homes, including as part of the 2015 Children's Homes Quality Standards project.

Executive summary

- We do not believe that current regulatory arrangements are sufficient and would like to see strengthened regulation and monitoring around how staff acquire mandatory qualifications and receive continuing training.
- The quality of staff who work in children's homes is utterly material to the outcomes of children who live there. We would like to see skilled and caring residential care staff get the professional recognition they deserve through registration.
- Registration and the establishment of professional standards should also further protect the rights and safety of children, but this must be carefully managed so as not to dissuade the workforce from acting in the best interests of children or negatively impact recruitment.
- We would welcome other forms of training as routes into residential care work, but this must be backed up by individualised plans for training and development.
- Young people want the professionals supporting them to care about them, develop strong relationships and spend time with them, to communicate well and be aspirational for them. These qualities should be encouraged within any professional standards.

Response to call for evidence

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the existing regulatory arrangements for the children's homes workforce are robust enough to protect children? If you disagree, what are the main areas where improvements in workforce regulation need to be made?

- 1.1. Regulation must be proportional to the harm it seeks to prevent. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse interim report¹ which provided the recommendation to prompt this consultation clearly illustrates the longstanding and intense harm which can result, and from which all young people living in children's homes must be protected. Any new developments in regulation must be aimed at building a supported and supporting workforce that seeks to provide children in care with the stable, loving and nurturing home environment they deserve.
- 1.2. Enhanced DBS checks for staff and Ofsted registration of managers are alone insufficient mechanisms to ensure the protection and promotion of children's physical safety and wellbeing. Ofsted are unable to inspect often enough to guarantee the workforce in each home is appropriately trained and has the capability to deliver each of the quality standards consistently.
- 1.3. We agree with the calls for independent regulation and registration requirements for the children's home workforce to align England with practice in the other home nations.
- 1.4. We would like to see strengthened regulation and monitoring around the acquisition of mandatory qualifications for the children's home workforce, as well as how individual homes plan to provide continuing training and professional development for staff specific to the needs of the young people they support.
- 1.5. We would also like to see an independent body established to provide professional registration for the children's home workforce and to maintain a set of standards for training, conduct and CPD.
- 1.6. As the number of children's homes continues to increase – particularly within the private sector which now controls 73% of homes² – we must do all we can to ensure the growing workforce is one which has a suitable level of knowledge, skill and good practice. 33 large organisations run 36% of all homes, with the five largest organisations owning 17% of homes³. Whilst their ability to achieve economies of scale in terms of workforce requirements may cut costs, this may introduce new patches of vulnerability in the safeguarding of the young people in their care. It is important to consider the 2015 regulations in the rapidly changing context of children's homes and who runs them in 2019 and beyond.

2. What do you think are the potential benefits of establishing professional registration requirements for registered managers and people in care roles?

¹ Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, April 2018. *Interim Report: A Summary*.

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/document/interim-report-summary>

² Ofsted, February 2019. *Children's social care data in England 2017 to 2018: main findings*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2018/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>

³ Ibid

- 2.1. As we have argued previously⁴, the quality of staff who work in children's homes is utterly material to the outcomes of children who live there.
- 2.2. Establishing professional registration requirements for both registered managers and people in care roles has the potential to promote higher professional standards within the sector, drive positive changes in the level of experience and training across the workforce and elevate the status of residential care and the people who work in children's homes.
- 2.3. It is unfortunate that the extremely skilled and caring staff who work across many fantastic children's homes do not get the professional recognition they deserve. Residential care is often wrongly seen as the 'last resort' for young people, and residential care staff aren't typically viewed in the same way as other social care professionals, such as social workers.
- 2.4. Establishing a body to oversee registration and develop a set of professional standards should act to improve caring staff's professional status and provide a more consistent level of training and support across England. This in turn would contribute to a happier, better informed and sustained workforce that demonstrates greater levels of job satisfaction and retention, and delivers better care to looked after children.

3. How would the introduction of professional registration impact on child safeguarding?

- 3.1. Professional registration which includes an openly viewable register, similar to that seen in other professions in healthcare and elsewhere, will crucially allow employers to identify any concerns associated with applicants during previous employment.
- 3.2. Currently, managers have to complete a fitness for practice interview with Ofsted and staff in care roles must be Enhanced DBS-checked, mechanisms which may not capture previous incidents which question their ability to deliver to professional standards. As such, registration serves to protect the rights and safety of children by ensuring no unfit professionals are allowed to continue in a caring role.

4. What do you think are the potential drawbacks of establishing professional registration requirements for registered managers and people in care roles?

- 4.1. Although we support professional registration, there is the potential for it to contribute to staff feeling overly constrained or subject to intense scrutiny at a detriment to the duties of their role and the children they care for. There needs to be trust in the workforce's professional judgement and sufficient flexibility so they can deliver support which responds to the needs of individual children in each home.
- 4.2. It is important to consider previous work examining the impact of professional registration within social work⁵ to ensure the children's home workforce doesn't practice 'defensively' in response to the threat of external sanction, and instead is encouraged by registration to act in the best interests of children at all times.

5. To what extent do you agree that the current mandatory qualifications are sufficient for registered managers and people in care roles? To what extent do you agree that

⁴ The Who Cares? Trust, 2016. Response to Martin Narey's review of children's residential care by The Who Cares? Trust. https://www.becomecharity.org.uk/media/1116/7-response-to-martin-narey-residential-care-review_submission-wct.pdf

⁵ Meleyal, Lel Francis, 2012. *Reframing conduct: a critical analysis of the statutory requirement for registration of the social work workforce*. University of Sussex. <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/7665/>

there should be other forms of training (for example, T Levels and apprenticeships) available to ensure staff are competent and deliver high quality care? If you agree, what form should this training take?

- 5.1. Expanding the range of training and qualification options for the children's home workforce to T Levels, apprenticeships and other routes will be a positive step to widening the pool of potential staff and alleviating ongoing staffing pressures.
- 5.2. However, we want to see stricter requirements in monitoring the acquisition of mandatory qualifications by staff after starting their first caring role or management position. An open professional register enabled by transferable and flexible training provision will allow the independent body to track when staff should have completed their mandatory qualifications and make this known to future employers.
- 5.3. Mandatory qualifications will inevitably only be able to provide a basic overview of key theoretical concepts, and registration is incomplete without a comprehensive and consistent training offer to back it up. Residential care workers report that the majority of their learning takes place on the job.
- 5.4. Therefore, we would like to see a stronger regulatory focus and emphasis within professional standards on continuing training and professional development for home managers and staff. Each member of staff should have an individualised plan for training which supports them to develop the right knowledge and skills for the home in which they work and the children they care for; each home and individual is different, requiring a flexible, targeted and personalised approach to training.

6. To what extent do you agree that professional standards should be established for people in care roles in children's homes? If you agree, what should these professional standards cover?

- 6.1. When we listen to young people in care, they want the staff supporting them to care about them and spend time with them. They want staff working in children's homes to have good communication with each other, particularly between shifts or when staff leave; young people might disclose problems they are encountering to one worker and find there isn't always someone there with the right knowledge to support them. They want to be able to choose who their key workers are, and to have the time to develop strong relationships with them.
- 6.2. Taking into consideration what we often hear from young people living in children's homes, we believe professional standards should cover (but aren't limited to) the following areas of professional knowledge, understanding, values and skills:
 - Knowledge of rights and entitlements for young people in and leaving care.
 - Knowledge of theory around trauma and attachment, and how the impact of prior experiences, such as abuse and neglect, can impact on young people's behaviour.
 - Awareness of the legal framework and ethical boundaries in which residential care staff and wider children's services operate.
 - Comprehensive understanding of safeguarding protocols and practice when caring for vulnerable young people in a residential context.

- Understanding of equality and diversity, non-discriminatory behaviours and cultural competency.
- Demonstration of exceptional communication skills and the ability to listen and speak with young people with varying levels of communicative ability, as well as support them to have a voice in the decisions made about them.
- Ability to build strong, individual relationships with young people as well as colleagues, and support young people to develop social relationships themselves.
- Ability to maintain their fitness to practise by accessing continuing training and development opportunities and engage in reflective practice.

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