Trainer's notes

Unit No. 1   An introduction to being looked after: Dispelling the myths

Unit objectives

- To acquire information about looked after children and care leavers in Scotland.

- To consider why they are at particular risk of having poor outcomes, including low educational attainment, and physical and mental health difficulties.

- To emphasise that despite barriers, looked after children can and do achieve.

- To draw attention to the impact individual workers can have in providing encouragement and in holding high aspirations for children.

- To explain how support for looked after children sits within the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach.

- To reflect on the implications for your own work context and professional responsibilities.

Outline of Unit

- Introduction

- Craig's experiences of being looked after

- Who is looked after in Scotland?

- What are some of the facts, myths and stereotypes about these children and care leavers?

- What is expected of professionals and how can individual workers help?

Resources required to deliver unit

- Film: "Craig's Story"

- "Craig's Story": Notes for Trainers (pdf)

- PowerPoint: An introduction to being 'looked after' in Scotland

- Handouts: Observations on Placement; Being Looked After Quiz; Being Looked After Quiz: Answers (Word)

- Working together to improve outcomes (Scottish Government, 2008) (pdf)

- Flipchart paper and pens

Resources required to support this unit

- CELCIS website: www.celcis.org

- Scottish Government statistics about children & young people:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children

- Children's Hearings system website: www.childrens-hearings.co.uk

- A Guide to Getting it Right for Children and Families (Scottish
Government, 2012): http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-
People/gettingitright/publications/practice-guide

- Looked After Children & Young People: We Can And Must Do Better
(Scottish Government, 2007)(pdf)

- Core tasks for designated managers (pdf)

- Working together to improve outcomes (Scottish Government, 2008)
(pdf)

- Background article: Hare, A. & Bullock, R. (2006). Dispelling
misconceptions about looked after children. *Adoption & Fostering*, 30
(4), pp. 26-35. (pdf) [Note: permission for use has been given by the
publisher, BAAF)

- Circular 1 2009 The Education (Additional Support for Learning)
(Scotland) Act 2009 (Schools Division, 2009) (pdf)

- Supporting children's learning: Code of practice (Scottish Government,
2010) (pdf)

Introduction to trainer

This unit can be used in a variety of ways. For example, it could form the basis
of a generic introduction to the educational development and wellbeing of
looked after children and care leavers for a broad range of groups, including
relevant professionals, teacher education and social work students, children's
panel members, elected members and local and central government officials. It
could also be the introductory session (lasting 2 hours and 30 minutes) in a
more intensive course for particular groups.

If you have only one hour available, we suggest selecting the following from
the menu:

- Trainer introduction (5 minutes)

- Showing of the film, "Craig's Story", followed by discussion (45 minutes)

- Trainer presentation on Who is Looked After in Scotland (10 minutes)

- Distribute Working together to improve outcomes (pdf)

This session aims to provide participants with an introduction to children and care leavers who are looked after in Scotland. As a group, they are particularly disadvantaged and are at risk of having low educational attainment and mental health difficulties. Despite the challenges presented by the life-event difficulties typically experienced by looked after children and care leavers, it is known that positive attitudes by professionals and co-ordinated approaches by agencies can make dramatic differences. The unit is designed to provide background to the issues for elected members and officers and also to act as an introduction to a more detailed training programme for particular professionals. Trainers should feel free to select from the suggested activities and also to adapt them to suit particular needs.

Trainer presentation (5 minutes)

Provide a short introduction to outline the objectives and to contextualise the session (slide 1). This will obviously need to be tailored for the particular group. You might, for example, explain the two-fold purpose of the session: to be introduced to information about a group of children and care leavers who are often disadvantaged in education; and also to begin to think about the implications for their own work context and professional responsibilities.

Point out that children become looked after when the state intervenes in their upbringing for a range of reasons. They can be looked after 'at home' or 'away from home' in different settings (slide 2). Some children will have experienced a number of separate episodes of being looked after, possibly in different kinds of placements. Placement moves often necessitate changes of school.

Activity (30 minutes)

Ask participants to note down privately the possessions, attributes and beliefs they were given as children by the people who brought them up which they value now – not just toys or other objects, but also values and skills. Emphasise that participants will not be asked to disclose personal details to the group, but that feedback will be more general. After five minutes ask participants to work in twos or threes to share some of the things which they have noted. After a further five minutes ask the group to provide feedback on the sorts of things that were common and record these on a flipchart.

Notes for trainer

People may report gaining a sense of identity, values, positive experiences, a moral framework and confidence/self-esteem. When taking the feedback, prompt further discussion by asking how this was done, drawing out responses about warmth, interest, involvement, routines, family events and celebrations, stability and predictability. Be aware that in any group there are likely to be participants who had difficult childhoods and who may find this exercise uncomfortable. Emphasise that children who are looked after may not have had many of these positive experiences. For those who become separated from

their family, the actual separation may undermine any good relationships they have. Children who are separated from parents and siblings often worry about the wellbeing of their significant family members. Adults who have had positive early experiences may find it hard to appreciate what is really happening in the lives of looked after children. This could be addressed by asking participants to think about how it might feel to be separated from family or to have someone from outside the family come to talk about their parenting.

Activity (45 minutes)

Introduce the film (or scenes from the film) "Craig's Story", designed to help participants to understand being looked after from the perspective of a child, and also the possible effects on social, emotional and educational development.

After viewing the film, invite participants to form in small groups to discuss their reactions to "Craig's Story". What feelings and thoughts did the film provoke (a) personally and (b) professionally? If appropriate, this discussion could be expanded by asking participants to list actions they could take, either individually or collaboratively.

Key points

- The intention is to demonstrate vividly to participants that looked after children can be seriously disadvantaged in adult life by their pre-care experiences.

- Point out the impact of trauma and neglect on children's development.

- For some children, the looked after system can add to the disadvantages they experience through placement instability and insufficient support at key transition times.

- The importance of stability in care and educational support for all looked after children in tackling disadvantage should be highlighted.

- Emphasise that educational success is a very important predictor of good adult outcomes for looked after children.

- Many looked after children do very well at school and with appropriate intervention those who have fallen behind in their education can be helped to overcome barriers to learning and raise their attainment.

Trainer presentation (10 minutes)

The term 'looked after,' originally introduced by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, signifies the role of a local authority in assisting and supporting families, rather than taking over from them. The term 'corporate parent' is used to describe the statutory responsibilities that various public sector have towards looked after children and care leavers. A child usually becomes looked after as a result of a supervision order made by a Children's Hearing. A smaller

proportion are looked after as a result of a voluntary arrangement between the family and their local authority. Many looked after children are subject to a supervision order while continuing to live 'at home', while others live 'away from home' in a range of settings, including foster care, kinship care, residential care, residential schools, and secure care (slide 3).

You might like to recommend the following sources for additional information (slide 7):

- Children's Hearing system web site: http://www.chscotland.gov.uk/

- CELCIS website: www.celcis.org

- Scottish Government statistics about children & young people: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children

- Scottish Government Getting it Right For Every Child website: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright

Activity (30 minutes)

The aim of this group activity is to consider some of the facts, myths and stereotypes about looked after children and care leavers. Introduce the activity by saying that there are many myths about looked after children and that the following activity is designed to dispel some of the myths.

Distribute the hand-out, Being Looked After Quiz: Dispelling the Myths. Ask participants to decide which of the ten questions are true and which are false. Alternatively, this could be done as a pub quiz, with the trainer reading out the questions and introducing a competitive element for fun. The quiz could be adapted by introducing questions relating to local issues or to contextualise it for the participant group.

Distribute the hand-out, Being Looked After Quiz: Dispelling the Myths - Answers, or read out answers. Follow up with discussion – see key messages below. You might like to use slide 4 (illustrating Who Cares? Scotland's 'Give Me a Chance' campaign) as a backdrop to a discussion of the myths associated with being looked after. The key point is that even though a proportion of children become looked after as a result of involvement with the criminal justice system, the needs of the child are always regarded as paramount. Suggest that participants look up statistical information for themselves on the Scottish Government website www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children(follow looked after children link).

Activity (30 minutes)

This activity might be more suitable for groups of teachers, teacher education students, educational psychologists or multi-professional groups. The aim of the activity is to encourage discussion about the differences in attitudes towards

looked after children and pupils in schools implied by the two accounts written by teacher education students on placement. Introduce the activity by saying that these are genuine rather than fictional accounts. We would require more information to make any judgements about the schools, and students on placement can have limited perspectives. On the other hand, the accounts have value because they pick up different atmospheres which will have implications for the educational progress of pupils who are looked after.

Distribute the hand-out, Observations by Secondary Education Students on Placement, and invite participants to consider the reflection question posed: 'After reading the accounts, reflect on(or discuss with fellow-course participants) the differences in ethos portrayed and the possible ways in which this might act as barriers to the progress of looked after children.'

Follow up with discussion – see key messages below. You should also try to locate support for looked after children within the principles and values of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (slide 5). Refer to the legal obligation (within the Education (Scotland) (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2009) for local authorities to assume that all looked after children have additional support needs and to consider whether as a result they require to have a 'co-ordinated support plan' (see Circular 1/2009 and the Code of Practice (2009).

Key messages(slide 7)

- The aim of the session/course is to draw attention to the typically poor outcomes of looked after children and to stimulate action leading to improvements. But, as Hare and Bullock (2006) point out, it is possible to: 'reinforce negative stereotypes of looked after children that not only insult them as individuals but also make it virtually impossible for them to make their way in the world' (p.35) (slide 6).

- Many looked after children do very well at school and with appropriate intervention those who have fallen behind in their education can be helped to overcome barriers to learning and raise their attainment.

- The Scottish Government has made looked after children a priority group within the general commitment to tackling poverty and disadvantage. A range of public sector bodies, not just social work agencies/professionals, have particular duties towards looked after children and young people. This includes the 'corporate parenting' duties of those organisations listed in schedule 4 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

- Children can be looked after 'at home' and 'away from home'.

- Schools should know which pupils are looked after and should liaise with social workers and carers to ensure that specific educational objectives are included in the Child's Plan.

- Every school should appoint a designated manager who has responsibility for pupils who are looked after. The role includes ensuring that appropriate support arrangements are in place, discussing with the child what information should be disclosed to teachers and how this will be done, monitoring key indicators, such as attendance and attainment.

- Identifying protocols and governance for the Lead Professional, and the role of the Named Person.