



# The Future of Children's Residential Care

David Berridge



# Background

- Residential social worker
- 30 years' research into children's services, including several studies of residential care
- English (international) perspective



# Handbook of Global Child Welfare (2017)

- Steady decline in use internationally in children's residential care. England 40,000 to 8,000 in 40 years. But some exceptions: Germany, Portugal, China, some former Soviet countries etc
- Stigma; outcomes; institutional abuse etc

# Handbook of Global Child Welfare (intro.)

- ‘Residential institutions across the world have an important part to play in ensuring the welfare and safety of large numbers of children and young people. Much good quality child care work occurs but it is often the institutional failures that hit the headlines. The harrowing images of children living in orphanages in Romania in the 1990s caused an international outcry. In the UK, widespread physical and sexual abuse of children living in institutions has been detected, also leading to widespread reforms. Many countries now seek to avoid children growing up in large, separate, isolated institutions but instead prefer they receive high quality physical and emotional care in smaller, more family-like groups. Any abuse or malpractice is more likely to be detected in such settings and vulnerable children can receive more appropriate care.’



# Handbook of Global Child Welfare (Conclusion)

- ‘Overall, the challenge for the care system, and for residential homes specifically, is to offer what good, loving families provide. We should aim for young people to be genuinely listened to and have a say in their care. There should be high aspirations for young people and support to achieve them. We need to test out new placements before children become fully committed with a permanent move. Young people should be able to remain in residential homes until they are ready to leave and not be moved on prematurely. Ex-residents should receive continuing support. Most importantly we need a care system that provides continuity in care for young people with skilled professionals who are genuinely child-centred. We hope that residential homes continue to develop in these directions.’



# Narey Review of Residential Care in England (2016)

- ‘So I see very little scope for reducing our reliance on children’s homes and I am quite clear that to do so would not be in the interests of children. As I have tried to make clear in this report, I think the role of children’s homes is misunderstood, the challenge of the children they care for underestimated, and the contribution they make too easily dismissed. Three-quarters of homes are good or better [OFSTED]. Some are genuinely outstanding. I have been moved by some of what I’ve seen. What they can achieve, is captured brilliantly here by one care leaver, who looks back on her experience with gratitude and affection:

“Residential care was my home, it was my life and it is still a big memory... care absolutely turned my life around and I now am in a position where I am studying social Residential work and giving back to the community... This would not have happened should I have remained in foster care.” ‘

# Narey conclusion

- ‘Such a body [Residential Care Leadership Board] could lead work on improving commissioning and obtaining better value for money for local authorities; advising Ministers on planning issues and on the role of and future demand for secure care; further reducing unnecessary criminalisation; keeping children safe and managing their behaviour; best practice in recruitment; and how best to implement Staying Close. Such a Board would, I believe, remove much of the suspicion and mistrust in the residential care world, improve best practice, and bring greater clarity and coherence to this much misunderstood and grossly under appreciated part of children’s social care.’

# Agency and resilience (Berridge 2017)

- ‘Rutter (2012) is a major influence in the field of resilience. Importantly, resilience is seen as something that is dynamic rather than fixed or inherent to the individual. For resilience to occur there is a need to discontinue negative influences from the past as well as to create new opportunities (Rutter, 2013). ‘Turning points’ in life can occur, such a new relationship or family, which can lead to a new adult trajectory. Good social relationships are usually important for individuals to be resilient. This is consistent with the provision of secure attachments and unconditional support (Howe, 1995). Raised self-esteem and self-efficacy can help convince individuals that they can overcome life's problems, rather than feel powerless (Rutter, 1999). A sense of achievement can give young people greater confidence to plan for the future.’



# The future of residential care?

Caveats – much of this been said before; different types of residential care; Wales may be different. Nonetheless:

- Shift to foster care generally a good thing and envied in many countries. In England not much scope, it seems, to reduce further
- Importance of theoretical coherence/style of care
- Good links with other/specialist services eg Virtual Schools, schools/colleges, careers, mental health, housing, DWP and other Council services for jobs/apprenticeships etc
- The calibre and skills of staff are key, especially the head of home
- Be child-centred. A lot of interaction (eg RESuLT study)
- Emphasise relationships → resilience
- Pilot specific initiatives eg North Yorkshire, *No Wrong Door*
- Continuing aftercare (25 in parts of USA)

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