



Training and developing staff in children's homes

Clarissa White, Jennifer Gibb and Berni Graham
(National Children's Bureau Research Centre) with
Alex Thornton, Sarah Hingley and Ed Mortimer
(TNS BMRB)

Introduction

This summary reports the key findings of research into the qualifications, skills and training requirements of staff working in children's homes. It is based on case studies carried out in 20 children's homes at the end of 2013 and early 2014. They were selected from a census¹ which generated a profile of children's homes across England.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre and TNS BMRB were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to carry out this research. It is intended that the findings will feed into work being led by the DfE and the sector to revise the training and qualifications of staff in residential children's care.

The full report is available here: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/what-we-do/research/our-research/a-z-research-projects/training-and-developing-staff-in-childrens-homes>

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-workforce-census>

Key findings

- Whilst this research has highlighted the importance of formal training and the acquisition of qualifications, experience and 'learning on the job' were believed to be key to developing and equipping staff with the requisite skills to work in a children's home.
- The specialist nature of residential care work meant that induction followed by a comprehensive and rolling programme of in house training was necessary to equip staff to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Training enabled staff to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the issues affecting young people and the theory behind their practice.
- Shadowing, supervision and feedback from home managers, other senior staff and external specialists were crucial to the learning process.
- Training is more likely to be of benefit and value if it is rooted in the work of a particular home and young people being cared for.
- Individual homes should ideally develop a training strategy or pathway that integrates all learning and development activities. This needs to be flexible and to cater for staff at different levels, with different learning styles and needs.
- Wherever possible training should be delivered in person and be as interactive as is feasible.

Background

The research is set against a backdrop of increasing concerns about the qualifications, specialist knowledge and skills of staff working in children's homes. A recent report produced by the Expert Group² on the quality of children's homes highlighted the main issues facing the children's workforce as being: insufficient levels of qualification and specialist knowledge and skills; inadequate career pathways and progression routes; a lack of reward and recognition in return for the exacting requirements of care staff; and a lack of identity or shared core professional standards.

Methodology

- The children's homes census was the first of its kind and was carried out to capture a snapshot of the children's homes sector in 2013. It gathered information on the services that homes offered and the type of staff they employed. It also collected detailed information about the qualifications of staff working in homes.
- A cross section of children's homes was selected as case studies from the census. These homes were chosen to enable exploration of the training, qualification and skill requirements of staff working across a range of different types of children's homes. During day long visits to each of the homes interviews were carried out with a range of staff involved in managing and working directly with children and young people. As far as was feasible the children and young people living in the children's home were included in the research.
- A second visit was carried out with nine of the larger children's homes. This provided the opportunity to develop the learning from the first visit and explore in a group staff views about the ideal induction and training programme.

Profiling the case study children's homes

The 20 case study homes were supporting young people in a range of ways including: keeping them safe and secure; providing emotional support and therapy; working with their families and partner agencies; helping them establish routines and changing behaviour; providing and supporting their access to education; providing leisure activities for them; and helping to prepare them for independence.

Recruiting and retaining staff

- Over half of all managers (54%) who took part in the census reported difficulties in recruiting staff with the appropriate level of skills and training. Managers in the case studies attributed their difficulties to attracting people with adequate experience, skills and insight and facing competition with other similarly low paid, entry level work, which required no previous qualifications.
- Few staff started work in the sector with relevant qualifications and experience.
- Managers looked for staff with the ability to care, a commitment and passion for the job, emotional maturity, intelligence and resilience and core knowledge and practice skills that are required for working with young people in residential care.
- Retention was said to relate directly to how well a home was managed, the stresses of the job and the ease with which a person could juggle their work alongside their personal commitments and career aspirations.

Workforce development

- Typically, there was an initial induction period of varying duration but often of one to two weeks in which staff read through procedures and files and shadowed experienced staff.
- Core training, refreshed at regular intervals, typically covered (at least) the following areas: behaviour management (de-escalation and physical interventions); safeguarding or child protection; health and safety, fire safety, first aid and medication; food and hygiene; and equality and diversity.
- Additional training options included attachment theory, restorative justice, child exploitation and online protection (CEOP).
- Alongside taught or online courses, staff learned from experienced colleagues, and particularly managers, who modelled best practice. Regular, one-to-one supervision was used for discussing performance and development.

- Team meetings, debriefs and group supervision provided further opportunities for learning and reflection.
- Time spent in training or CPD varied according to the career stage or role of staff. New recruits, managers and qualified social workers spent more time in training than others, while relief workers³ appeared to have limited opportunities beyond mandatory provision.

Views about training

- Induction and training were considered an essential part of developing good residential workers.
- Supervision, shadowing and feedback were felt to be integral to this process.
- Training enabled staff to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the issues affecting young people and the theory behind the practice. As such, it helped hone and develop skills and ability to work with children and young people.
- The specialist nature of the work meant that a comprehensive and rolling programme of training was necessary to equip staff to meet the needs of the children and young people.

The Level 3 and Level 5 Diplomas

- The Level 3 Diploma was valued for giving staff the opportunity to consider the wider context of their work, and enabling them to learn about and reflect on their practice. Concerns revolved around the Diploma being overly generic in its content and with the assessment being based on written rather than practical work. It was also criticised for operating in parallel with other training, a lack of practical application and for not adequately reflecting the true nature and demands of working in a children's home.

³ Bank staff refers to a pool of people an employer can call on as and when work becomes available. The employer is not obligated to provide work for these staff, nor are they obliged to accept it.

- There was much less discussion about the Level 5 Diploma, due in part to there being far fewer people with experience of it within the case study sample.
- Views on the Level 5 diploma appeared to be more positive, perhaps because it is better orientated to helping managers with their role, and therefore seemed more applicable to their job.
- Participants' suggestions for improving the Diplomas were concerned with: creating a more flexible qualification; alignment with training provided in the home; streamlining their focus; encouraging interactive delivery; and increasing consistency in standards and the approach to assessment.

Policy and practice messages

- Whilst this research has highlighted the importance of formal training and the acquisition of qualifications, experience and 'learning on the job' were believed to be key to enabling staff to work in a children's home.
- In-house training provision was judged as more helpful than the Level 3 Diploma, principally because it was more applicable to the work in a children's home.
- Views varied about the need to improve the training that staff received within their home. Discussion about the 'ideal' training programme generated a long list of topics. These covered theoretical and specialist knowledge about child development and disability; techniques for improving practice and ways of working with children and young people; as well as procedures for working in a children's home.
- Qualifications need to offer different access and training routes to cater for different learning preferences and abilities and enable people to pursue a career in residential care at different points in their lives. Any future development of training and qualifications needs to:
 - Involve both the acquisition and application of knowledge, procedures and policy.
 - Develop a training strategy or pathway that integrates all learning and development activities. This needs to be flexible and to cater for different levels, learning styles and needs.
 - Be rooted in the work of a particular home and young people being cared for.
 - Be delivered by people who are knowledgeable about children's homes.
 - Be delivered in person and be as interactive as is feasible.
- However, any review of qualifications or training should be set within the broader context of needing to raise the profile, status and pay of staff working in a children's home.



Research Centre
National Children's Bureau
8 Wakley Street
London EC1V 7QE

Tel: 020 7843 6073
Email: research@ncb.org.uk

www.ncb.org.uk

 [@ncbtweets](https://twitter.com/ncbtweets)

Useful numbers

Book Sales: 0845 458 9910
Conferences and Training: 020 7843 6041
Fundraising: 020 7843 6329
Information Centre: 020 7843 6008
Membership: 020 7843 6080
Young NCB: 020 7843 6099

Registered Charity Number 258825

 facebook.com/ncbfb