

Aftercare in Norway – what recent research tells us

Keeping the Door Open – Support to young People Leaving Care

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Research object and design

- Object:
 - To elicit research-based knowledge about how the Child Welfare Services do their aftercare work
- Methods
 - New data and reanalyzes of existing data
 - Data based on registers, surveys, interviews
 - A multi-informant design
 - A literature review



What does international literature tell us?

- Offering good enough services to youth transitioning to adulthood are a global challenge
- Youth transitioning from care experience an accelerated and compressed transition to grow-up life compared to youth in general
- Even though several youth do well as grown ups, far too many have troubled lives as adults.



- Good aftercare services must be multidimensional and consist of packages of different services
- Services should include economic support, a place to live, stimulate educational attainment and employment, practical and emotional support, contribute to continuity and stability and strengthen the persons` social network
- Services should be well planned. Planning should start early and be well organized. It is important to ensure participation from the youngsters themselves
- Prolonging time in care increases the odds for a positive outcome



Numbers and characteristics

- The number of after care clients have increased from 550 in 1995 to 2100 in 2005
- Number of clients decreases after they turn 18. Very few receive aftercare after they are 20 years old.
- Most common measures are: Economic support, foster care, help to find housing and a support person
- Receiving after care services increases the odds of better outcomes concerning educational attainment, employment and income



After care seen from the young peoples point of view

- Data: interviews with 50 young people aged 16-20 years in a follow-up study and focus group interviews with 5 women in their early twenties.
- Fairly optimistic about their future
- Most of them wanted to continue in care after attaining majority at the age of 18 and believe this is possible for them
- Caseworkers expressed far more negative expectations about their clients future



- Half of the youngsters believe they will need further support:
- Economic support, help with education, employment and counselling. Wish to avoid loneliness, to feel safe and have a supportive relationship with at least one person
- Difficult to define ones needs exactly at the age of 18. This sometimes results in delays in planning the transition phase. More flexibility in the system is needed
- Demanding negotiations with the Child Welfare Services.



How is after care conducted by the Child Welfare Services?

- Data: A representative survey among Norwegian municipal Child Welfare Services
- A challenge to secure good aftercare services in a country where municipalities vary greatly in size
- Low degree of specialization, differences in practice, variations in after care availability
- The assessment of the youngsters needs of after care measures starts late



- Lack of motivation from the youngsters was the main reason for not offering further help
- Important to give them opportunity to return to the child welfare system
- Few collaborate with schools and psychiatric services
- Challenges concerning collaboration between different service providers but also within the Child Welfare system.



After care services offered by the residential units

- Data: A representative study among the residential units and focus group interview with 7 leaders
- After care is conducted systematically and targeted
- 2/3 offer aftercare services (training of independence and housing arrangements)
- 9/10 provided a contact person following the youth over time and 4/5 had their own individual plans with objectives which included the transition to independence



- Tailor-made services according to individual needs
- Transitioning to adulthood takes time. Giving youth sufficient time should be accepted as a method in after care work
- Predictable economic support and ascribing legitimacy to the work being done are important conditions for providing good after care services
- Challenges concerning inter-service collaboration



Aftercare and the role of foster parents

- Data: Interviews with foster parents of 27 young persons participating in the follow-up study and a focus group interview with 7 foster parents
- Foster parents were "careful optimistic" about their foster child's future
- There were no indications of foster home break downs as a consequence of the child reaching majority at the age of 18.
- Foster parents take responsibility for a series of tasks during the transition period



- There is a lack of clarity concerning who is responsible for making plans for aftercare
- Foster parents felt disempowered when asking for after care measures on behalf of their foster child since aftercare is an option and not a legal right for the child
- Foster parents were concerned for Child Welfare Services being extremely problem focused in their descriptions of the child
- There is a need for a more distinct and definite role for foster parents during the transition phase, with more clearly defined responsibilities, better information and more resources

