



The Right Home Project Evaluation Summary

Background

The Right Home Project (RHP) is a cross-agency approach to providing the right accommodation and support at the right time to young people on the edge of care or at risk of being homeless in Calderdale. The project involves collaboration between Children and Young People's Services, Housing Services and accommodation providers. It aims to bridge the gap in provision for vulnerable young people who present at risk of entering care or becoming homeless (including 16 and 17 years olds) by creating a streamlined assessment and allocation pathway, via a single multi-agency panel, to an enhanced range of accommodation options. The RHP developed 5 strands: a Short Stays residential option and a Boarding School option for adolescents on the edge of care and their families; a 24hr Intensive Supported Accommodation service and Foyer provision for vulnerable 16-25 year olds at risk of homelessness; and a Staying Close option for young people leaving residential care. The evaluation sample comprised the first cohort of 33 young people who entered the RHP for at least one overnight stay.

Aims and objectives

The overall objective of the RHP was to improve the support and outcomes for vulnerable young people at risk of family or housing breakdown by providing a more efficient service and offering a broad and flexible range of accommodation options alongside different levels of support to meet varying and changing needs. To achieve this RHP worked with partners to increase the range and availability of accommodation options and the quality and effectiveness of support for vulnerable young people aged 11–25. The intended outcomes for the RHP included local authority (LA) level outcomes (reduced numbers of adolescents entering care and homelessness in the LA, streamlined access routes and provision across the different service options, and cost savings); and young people and family level outcomes (improved wellbeing; participation in education, employment and training, improved family relationships, and reduced homelessness and family breakdown to prevent entry to care where appropriate).

Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to understand, for the purpose of sustainability and replication, the factors necessary for setting up and operating the RHP during its first year, from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. The evaluation also aimed to explore the characteristics and needs of those using the RHP, its impact on a range of outcomes and the related cost benefits. The short time frame for fully operationalising the RHP meant that a follow-up timescale in which to realistically expect to observe outcomes was restricted. The evaluation was, however, able to report on the needs and the experiences of those using the RHP and the early progress and initial outcomes for young people and families. It was not possible during the evaluation time frame to provide a cost benefits analysis due to the sample size and lack of outcome data. Data gathered on implementation were gathered from RHP and accommodation managers at RHP start (17) and follow-up (13) and front line staff (5). Service user data were gathered via management information systems on all 33 young people using the RHP during the evaluation time frame. Questionnaires and interview data were gathered from young people (21, 64%) and parents or carers, where relevant (6, 46%) at baseline (15, 45%) and at follow-up (5, 38%).

Findings

Service improvement

- all 5 RHP accommodation and support options were successfully implemented in the first year. All were operating at capacity, except the Boarding School option, which was withdrawn at the end of year 1
- the single pathway for assessing and referring young people to appropriate RHP options had taken time to refine and was considered to have brought greater efficiency, improved cross-agency working and information sharing, improved knowledge at practice level and thereby, an improved service response
- crucial to progress had been strong leadership, clear communication channels, a shared vision and common goals and buy-in within and across partner agencies. The RHP Board had kept things on track.

High levels of need and longstanding difficulties

- service users presented with high levels of vulnerability and need at entry to RHP. Over three-quarters (26, 79%) of RHP young people had multiple difficulties and risk behaviours
- difficulties for these young people and families could be long standing with 55% (18) having had past involvement with children's services and 30% (10) of young people had been in care in the past.

Evidence of positive progress over time across outcome areas

- levels of participation in education, employment and training (EET) increased from 67% at baseline to 80% at follow-up, reflecting a focus on EET within the accommodation options
- young people's reflections on progress over time reported improvements in EET for 87% (13), in home life (87%, 13) and life in general (60%, 9) at follow-up. There was an upward trend in young people's sense of wellbeing over time, which increased from a baseline mean of 64.4 to 72.5 at follow-up.

Reducing family and accommodation breakdown

- over half of the 'edge of care group' (7, 54%) had remained out of care, though not necessarily with their parents, with 15% (2) going to live with other family members over follow-up. Almost one-third (4, 31%) had entered care. This supported strong concerns from RHP staff that thresholds for accessing the service had been set too high for the first cohort and that the short stays option was being used as emergency placements for some young people who were already in the process of entering care
- there was evidence of positive progress for the 'at risk of homelessness group'. Most had found stability in accommodation, with 55% (11) living in their RHP accommodation for at least 8 months by follow-up.
- young people and families valued the flexibility and range of support received from staff. Having time away from family difficulties and being able to access support out-of-hours were particular advantages.

Recommendations and learning points

- implementing new approaches requires realistic timeframes to set up, test and refine procedures such as referral routes, thresholds for accessing services, and systems for monitoring and evidencing impact
- effective partnership working between children and young people's services and housing services, supported by strong leadership and a single referral pathway can lead to efficient assessment and allocation systems, increased information sharing and improved services for young people at crisis point
- the level of difficulties and needs of some of those using RHP demonstrate the challenges of managing thresholds and referral criteria, particularly for edge of care provision. To see whether and how such approaches prove effective in the long-term requires appropriate targeting and longitudinal research.

This evaluation of Calderdale's Right Home Project was carried out between August 2015 and September 2016 by Jo Dixon, Jenny Lee and Jade Ward, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York.

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