

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in this research with CASCADE, Cardiff University.

This newsletter highlights some of the main findings from phase one of the research with young people.

Background to the research

Leaving school can be a difficult time for all young people. The transition from school to a new destination is a critical period. If young people are not supported in the right ways, then there is a risk that they will not continue into further education, training or work. Research has shown that these risks can increase for those who leave alternative education settings, such as pupil referral units (PRUs), and those who are care experienced.

This research focuses on the transitions of care experienced young people who are leaving PRUs aged 16 across Wales. Working with a group of young people over three years, the research aims to highlight the factors that support them in their transitions and the barriers that get in the way. This will help us to improve things in the future.

Who took part?

Participants: 14

Age: 15-16

Location:

South Wales (11)

North Wales (3)

Interview times:

30-55mins

Research activity

The young people who took part were asked to complete an emotion emoji task about educational support. They sorted cards into different piles related to their experience of engagement with the people named on the cards. The researcher then asked the young people about the choices they had made, as well as other questions about their education, spare time, and hopes and dreams for the future.

Participants will be asked to give their feedback on this activity, to help develop and improve the research methods in the future.



What happened to the data?

All the conversations during the research activities were audio recorded and transcribed, along with notes taken by the researcher during their time at each PRU. All this data was then used to develop the main findings from the work with the 14 participants.

1. Findings: Moving from school to a PRU

The reasons why young people left their schools and moved to a PRU varied. Some experienced bullying or social anxieties, attendance was an issue for others and challenging behaviour was also mentioned.

Recurring themes included how participants felt their wider needs were not supported or understood by staff. Their descriptions also highlighted how they had missed out on large amounts of learning. This was because:

1. They were regularly put into detention or isolation rooms in their previous schools and therefore missed out on lessons.

2. They were waiting to be placed into a PRU having left mainstream school.

In addition to the difficulties they were already facing, these experiences of education meant that the participants had fallen even further behind with their schooling, once they arrived in a PRU. It also meant that they had missed out on the supportive social environment that schools provide.

"Constant detentions... suspensions, about 20 times."

"I'm not saying they don't care in mainstream, but here [PRU] they actually know you."

"I didn't go to a school for about three years."

"I left and had a year off school...and got referred to [PRU] and went through a panel, went through court...the first time I got rejected and the person who stood up in court went mad and said 'listen, she's not in education' and so I ended up getting a place."

EDUCATION

2. Experiences at a PRU

The time participants had been at a PRU varied between two months and three years. Their experiences of a PRU were generally positive. Many described the way that staff supported them by taking time to listen and understand their needs. PRUs felt like safe spaces where there was a sense of belonging, happiness and friendship. These experiences helped the young people to develop their confidence and belief in themselves once more:

"This school has brought me laughter, life lessons and a whole lot of memories that I'll hold in my heart forever...when I didn't believe in myself, they all did...There's one important thing that I will take from this place. What love is...You could be having the hardest time at home but as soon as you enter here, you get a feeling of love and support."

There were also challenges in the PRUs. Some participants felt that their educational opportunities were restricted due to their being fewer resources and fewer subjects to choose from, compared with their previous schools. Generally, however, the young people felt that their lives had improved considerably since moving to a PRU, both in terms of their re-engagement with education and in meeting their wider social needs.

3. Ambitious plans for the future

Despite describing many challenges in their personal lives, alongside the disruptions they had faced with their education, all the participants had ambitious plans for the future.

This included their post-16 plans:

Health and Social Care; Business Studies; Art; Child Development; Barbering; Fashion Business; Plastering; Public Services; Animal Care.

And their longer-term life ambitions: Own a property; Learn to drive; Have a family; Travel; Happiness; Part time work; Learn piano; Learn to horse ride; Go to University.



4. Feelings about moving on

The young people had mixed feelings about moving on from a PRU. Some described a sense of excitement about the change, whilst others were nervous. Many agreed, however, that they were ready for more independence:

"I'm looking forward to having more freedom...doing something I enjoy and not having to do all the different school subjects."

"I'm happy to leave but I'm also going to be sad because obviously I won't get as much support, but I think...I'm ready to edge away and do it myself."



5. Planning for post-16 transitions

The participants received a lot of support during their final months at the PRUs. This included PRUs being flexible with the needs of their learners, offering time to revise at home for exams. The PRU staff supported visits to colleges and held transition meetings, putting plans in place and assigning mentors. Alongside the practical support, PRU staff offered lots of emotional support to their learners. This included encouraging pupils to attend open days and involving young people in the planning of end of term celebration events and the writing up of reflections about their time at the PRU.

What happens next?

The young people will be interviewed from December 2022, to find out how their transition journeys are going.

Interviews will also be planned with professionals who support the young people.



For more information, please contact

Dr Phil Smith

SmithPR1@Cardiff.ac.uk

02920 879 865