The research summaries this month look at adolescent services and youth work including:

- Predictors of social service contact among 14-16 year olds in England
- Achieving high quality and long-lasting matches in youth mentoring
- Youth work with Roma children and young people in Derby
- The tensions experienced by youth workers between youth work policy and practice

Policy and report highlights this month

- Parliamentary inquiry will consider the children’s rights implications of Brexit
- HCPC publishes draft guidance on the use of social media
- MPs publish findings of inquiry into female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Inspectorates publish report on CSE and missing children

Related resources by Research in Practice

- Risk-taking adolescents and child protection Frontline briefing
- That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to adolescence Evidence scope and tailored support workshop
- Adolescent mental health Frontline briefing and tailored support workshop
- Young people and gang involvement: Identification, prevention and intervention Tailored support workshop
- Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme: Delivering an integrated service for complex and troubled young people Blog by North Yorkshire County Council

Related resources by others

- Transforming youth services: unlocking value through co-production (New Economics Foundation, 2014)
- Youthpolicy.org: The global evidence base for youth policy
- Participatory action and learning experiences with Roma youth: Training manual

Resources this month

- How safe are our children 2016: The most comprehensive overview of child protection in the UK by NSPCC
- The English Child Protection system: An accessible overview by Helen Baldwin and Nina Biehal
Articles and Summaries

“Achieving high quality and long-lasting matches in youth mentoring programmes: a case study of 4Results mentoring” (2016)

Research demonstrates that high quality mentoring impacts positively on youth development (DuBois et al, 2002; Blakeslee and Keller, 2012). This article describes the success of the Washington State-based 4Results mentoring programme in the context of existing research highlighting the importance of the length of a match between mentor and mentee, programme philosophy and infrastructure.

DuBois et al (2002) define mentoring as support that helps young people develop attributes such as self-esteem and coping strategies, and suggest mentoring is only effective when the mentor becomes a significant person in the mentee’s life. Key to effecting positive change is the empathic bond between mentor and mentee (Spencer and Rhodes, 2005). Establishing high quality mentoring can be challenging. The duration of the relationship is crucial, with arrangements of less than six months possibly leaving the mentee feeling abandoned (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). Young people with additional mental health needs or who have experienced the care system may be particularly vulnerable in this respect.

4Results Mentoring

4Results is modelled on the National Mentoring Partnership (1991) and additionally emphasises four evidence-informed aspects of child wellbeing:

- relationship for secure attachment
- resilience for healthy behaviours
- readiness for success
- respect for self and others.

All mentees come from low income families and have identified mental health needs. Mentors range from 19-89 years old and 69 per cent are female. They have a high school diploma as a minimum, and come from a diverse range of occupations. 4Results has successfully retained 98 per cent of mentors for at least one year.

Importance of match length

A match lasting more than a year is one of the strongest predictors of positive youth outcomes; 4Results has a notable average match length of 3.7 years. Conversely, a foreshortened match can contribute to negative outcomes with Grossman and
Rhodes (2002) finding matches of less than six months linked with increased alcohol use, for example. The longevity of 4Results matches is particularly impressive given the high need mentee population. 4Results attribute their success to the underpinning programme philosophy and infrastructure.

Training and service philosophy

The quality of the mentoring relationship is key to effective mentoring practice. Effective approaches include:

- focussing on young people’s strengths rather than deficits
- pairing mentors and mentees on similar interests
- youth focussed, empowerment-based mentoring.

4Results explicitly works to achieve a balance between unconditional acceptance of the mentee and modelling prosocial values. The mentors’ volunteer status underlines unconditional acceptance – they may be the only supportive adult not paid to be a part of the child’s life.

Mentors are trained in attachment theory to assist the development of relationships, with consistency and dependability key in overcoming initial mentee reluctance linked to a lack of trusting adult relationships. This aligns with recognition of the importance of attunement to the young person’s moods and preferences in the mentor/mentee relationship.

Programme infrastructure

Successful youth mentoring programmes need structured environments that support the mentor (DuBois et al, 2011). 4Results point to their rigorous recruitment, training and support of mentors when discussing their success.

Recruitment

Applicants participate in a two-hour interview; screening is based on their ability to be self-aware, emotionally healthy, set boundaries, and demonstrate a strengths-based view of children with high needs. Only one in fifty of those who show an initial interest go on to be matched, reflecting the importance of quality of match.

Training

Mentors complete a 20-hour training programme accentuating relationship building strategies, and incorporating opportunities to practise these behaviours. This surpasses national recommendations, and is further strengthened by the inclusion of Motivational Interviewing, a highly effective intervention (Miller and Rollnick, 2002). Long term evaluation is not yet available, but the literature demonstrates mentors who receive early match training and consistent support have long lasting, high quality mentee relationships (Herrera et al, 2013).
Supervision and support

Clear arrangements are in place to enable long term matches. The child’s therapist, parents, 4Results staff and mentor all form a collaborative, multi-disciplinary team providing support and direction to the mentor. Additionally, surveys at six and 12 months have been introduced to gain a better understanding of how well arrangements are working. These are completed by mentee, mentor, and mentees’ parents.

Conclusions

4Results is achieving a high rate of mentor retention and, consequently, an average match length of over 3 years. Key to this is:

- the volunteer nature of the mentoring
- the care given to the matching process
- 4Results places mentors within a supportive team.

The authors suggest further research on how implementing research-based mentor training and embedding mentors within multi-disciplinary teams may improve outcomes for young people as well as staff retention. Research into outcomes for 4Results mentees is currently being undertaken.

References


“Austerity youth policy: exploring the distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice” (2015)
Will Mason, Youth and Policy, No 114, pp 55-74.

Cooper (2011:1) has suggested that preoccupation with government targets ‘is closing off opportunities for progressive ways of working with young people and is…stifling the capacity of young people to overcome the structural constraints limiting their life chances’. Here, the experiences of youth workers and volunteers under the Coalition government are explored. The study constituted three years of ethnographic research with youth workers, volunteers and young people (aged 11-19) involved in three projects in a Northern English city.

The Coalition government’s approach to giving young people more opportunities and support involved promoting increased partnership working between voluntary and community groups and local businesses (CO and DfE, 2010). By mid-2011, budgets for education-based youth services were cut by 28 per cent on average, with some authorities cutting by 70, 80 and even 100 per cent (Davies, 2013). Simultaneously, the government made volunteering easier. Despite the austerity measures, UK youth workers are under increasing pressure to emphasise measurable outcomes, partnership working and targeted services.

The research highlighted numerous tensions between youth work in principle, as espoused by youth policy, and experiences of youth work in practice. In particular staffing, partnership working and training arose as key sites of contradiction.

Staffing

Casual workers and volunteers almost exclusively staffed services. In part, this reflected managerial commitments to the provision of local opportunities. However, local staffing was also a product of reduced funding which, across the country, has seen volunteers ‘increasingly replacing trained and qualified youth workers’ (Davies, 2013:14). For some, realisation that voluntary engagement could lead to a career in youth work marked a transition. The dissolution of these prospects through cutting funding is likely to have detrimental implications for the commitment of local volunteers.

Respondents often described their local ties with the communities as enabling them to draw on contextual understandings of attendees’ peer groups and families to develop mutually trusting and respectful relationships. However, this could also inhibit their capacity to engage in effective, critical practice. This was particularly the case amongst inexperienced workers and volunteers, some of whom struggled between informality and professionalism within youth club settings.
Partnership working

Voluntary engagement in informal relationships with young people defines youth work practice. All interviewees agreed that productive youth work was founded on mutual relationships of trust and respect which had to be earned over time. Brokering partnerships between local agencies was central to the Coalition government's youth policy. However, 'joining up' services is always challenging in practice and this alongside the fragility and centrality of the observed youth work relationships cemented local youth workers/volunteers reluctance to share information with the police and schools. Some partnerships did work eg with social workers or career development advisors. They were perceived to add value without compromising child-centred practice.

Training

Training plays an integral role in the delivery of professional and critical youth work practice and is necessary in order to deliver expected outcomes but youth work managers all reflected on the difficulties of professionally developing teams on shoestring budgets. Private investors in youth work required particular outcomes, such as youth attendance figures, which staff training sessions could not deliver. As a consequence there was little or no private investment in training. In-house alternatives were attempted but these were scheduled on weekends and had no financial incentive which considerably reduced attendance.

Workers'/volunteers' perception of youth work as a financially unsuitable career choice also reduced their inclination to attend the training opportunities available. This suggests that the challenges facing youth work managers in terms of staff development and retention (Dunne et al, 2014) are likely to be associated with the diminishing professional status of youth work imposed by the disappearance of sustainable funding.

Conclusions

Youth services are becoming increasingly reliant on volunteers and short term private investment. They are simultaneously expected to provide innovative practices, aligned with government priorities, which produce measurable outcomes. Despite these challenges, there is increasing evidence for the value if the youth work sector (Dunne et al, 2014a; 2014b). However, the findings here suggest that for the continued development of critical youth work practice practitioners must unite, define and defend youth work as a distinctive and indispensable discipline (IDYW, 2009; Taylor, 2013).

References


“Positive engagement through youth work: working with Roma children and young people in Derby, supporting their wellbeing” (2015)

Phil M Henry and Simon Williams, Today’s Children are Tomorrow’s Parents, Vol 40-41, pp 56 – 57.

This article explores the impact on wellbeing of Roma Community Care’s (RCC) youth work-led approach to engaging Slovak and Czech Roma young people in Derby. In developing this case study, the authors used an ethnographic approach. Both are involved in the project and they explore their status as both researcher and participant in the article.

Roma Community Care

There are 4000-6000 Roma migrants in Derby, a community with which the statutory sector has struggled to engage. RCC has adopted youth work values to engage and educate informally in ways that seek to reflect a positive sense of wellbeing for Roma children and young people in Derby. All five of the RCC team are Roma; their work includes youth work and assisting families with a range of housing, welfare, education and health issues. Over two years, RCC staff provided 48 weeks of youth work per year, establishing themselves as an important feature in the lives of young Roma in Derby.

Building reciprocal relationships

The provision of a secure and reliable relationship with a teacher-advocate who engages with the student empathically and non-judgmentally has been shown to have a positive impact on adolescents’ emotional wellbeing (Henry et al, 2003). When working with Roma young people and children in Derby, informal education has been an invaluable tool, allowing workers and young people to develop a deeper
understanding of each other’s history and culture as a basis for developing reciprocal relationships.

Gaining family support is particularly important when working with Roma young people. These reciprocal relationships provide the foundation for gaining the trust of young people as well as their communities, evidenced by family cooperation and young people’s ongoing engagement. More than 600 young people have registered with the project during its lifetime and many have gone on to become volunteers and role models within the community. Engagement has contributed to the young people’s increasing sense of belonging and positive behavioural change among young people schools have labelled ‘problematic’ or worse.

Creating cultural understanding in tackling structural issues

A long history of discrimination has produced a community who often lack trust in authority and may not seek statutory support when needed. Youth work helps provide space to examine self-worth and identity, and youth workers need to make sure that this is based on the needs of young people and recognises cultural sensitivities. For example, families are often affected by poverty, living in poor condition, over-occupied rented accommodation. Partly this is due to benefit constraints but also a culture of communal living. Such living conditions can impact negatively on children’s health and subsequently education and employment. They can also lead social care professionals to struggle to tease apart family values and structural factors when assessing possible instances of abuse and neglect.

Working holistically with Roma communities via youth work has helped promote understanding of housing, health, education and employment needs and enabled development of youth-led approaches to targeting issues.

Empowering Roma young people

There is a tension between the desire for greater integration into the wider Derby community and concerns about a dilution or loss of Roma tradition. Yet many Roma in Derby consider that a better future for their children is a potential outcome to life in the UK. Creating hope for the future is critical for adolescent Roma, dispelling high levels of ‘hopelessness’ reported in studies of Roma adolescents in Slovakia (Kolarcik et al, 2012). Youth workers do not offer false hope, which can have negative consequences, but offer equality of opportunity as a model underpinning this. For many Roma, this is all they are seeking:

I don’t mind being different and I am proud of my culture but I want to be given the same chances as anyone else, not to be discriminated against because of my colour or how I speak or where my family comes from.

Youth Work centred on young people’s needs can affect change through advocacy and the development of young people towards taking community leadership groups to challenge inequalities. As Roma young people increasingly take the lead on projects related to their wellbeing, it removes the feeling of being ‘targeted’ and empowers young people.
Conclusions

Though it is too soon to report on future outcomes for young Roma migrants in Derby, access to supported youth work is likely to have improved wellbeing based on its ability to create space for secure relationships, offer culturally sensitive models of engagement and empower young people to take the lead in tackling issues affecting them.

References


“Predictors of Social Service Contact among Teenagers in England” (2015)

Very few UK studies make use of longitudinal general population data to explore social service contact for children and young people. This paper asks to what extent structural, neighbourhood, familial and individual characteristics predict social service contact among young people in England between the ages of fourteen and sixteen due to their behaviour, the aim of the research being to inform the appropriate targeting of resources.

Each of the four studies drawn on have their limitations, notably that their data-sets are based on self-reporting and their capacity to capture consistent details about the nature of contact is limited. They also tend not to capture information on abuse or neglect—often the catalyst for behavioural issues that trigger intervention.

The findings presented in this paper are associations and do not establish causation - there may be multiple and interrelated mechanisms at play which are difficult to disentangle. None of the neighbourhood characteristics significantly predicted social service contact and therefore these are not reported.

Structural characteristics associated with social service contact

- Social class: In comparison to higher-grade professionals or administrators, the odds of contact significantly increase for all other class backgrounds except small proprietors.
- Family structure: Living with a stepfamily, compared to living with biological parents, increased the odds, so too does living with a foster parent (although
Ways family relationships and conflicts are related to social service contact

Familial characteristics that significantly predict social service contact include:

- Nature of parental contact with the school: attendance at specially arranged meetings at school (due to problems), a lower frequency of parents speaking to teachers and non-attendance at scheduled parents’ evenings all increase the odds of social service contact.
- The nature of the young person’s relationship with their parents: young people reporting a bad relationship with parents and parents reporting that they argue with their child most days show increased likelihood of contact.
- Parents socialising with their child is associated with reduced odds of social service contact, while strangely, parents reporting greater monitoring of a YP (ie setting curfews and knowing the YP’s whereabouts) increases the odds of social service contact slightly.

Individual characteristics associated with social service contact?

These results suggest that:

- Girls have significantly higher odds than boys of receiving social service contact.
- Mixed-race young people have higher odds of receiving social service contact than white adolescents.
- For those with identified special education needs, the likelihood of contact increase.
- Police contact also increases the likelihood.

Conclusions

Whilst these findings will not be surprising to those with experience of social work practice in the UK, they may trigger reflection on whether or not services are being appropriately targeted, particularly:

- Is it right that there should be such socio-economic variation in social service contact concerning teenagers’ behaviour, over and above reports of problem behaviours, contact with the police and so on?
- Is the variation in services a response to differential need or a stigmatising of particular social groups?
- The increased likelihood that girls will have social service contact in relation to their behaviour is less expected. Are there gendered differences in how girls and boys are treated by agencies?

The findings concerning individual and family characteristics may be relevant for planning interventions such as early help with family relationships and parent–child communication.
Finally, given what we know about the impact of multiple adversities on outcomes for young people (Fergusson and Horwood, 2003) we also need to know more about how these predictors interact.

References


Parliamentary Business

**Family with Children and Young People in Debt (Respite) Bill**

Both Houses returned from recess on 10 October. For a full list of Bills currently before Parliament [click here](#).

This Private Member’s Bill, introduced by Kelly Tolhurst (Con, Rochester and Strood), would place a duty on lenders and creditors to provide periods of financial respite for families with children and young people in debt ‘in certain circumstances’ (see RPU 187).

The Bill, which has yet to be published, is scheduled to have its second reading at the end of October. The Bill would also place a duty on public authorities to provide access to related advice, guidance and support for families in debt.

[further info](#)
Consultations

NSPCC reunification framework

The NSPCC is asking for feedback on its reunification framework for return home practice.

The framework, which was developed in partnership with the Children and Families Research Centre at the University of Bristol, was published last year. The NSPCC is asking practitioners and services who have used (or looked at) the framework to share their views via an online survey.

Responses will help determine how the framework is developed and what support needs to be in place to support its implementation.

Committee calls for evidence on UK’s record on children’s rights

The Joint Committee on Human Rights has issued a call for evidence to inform its follow-up work on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s recommendations for improving children’s rights in the UK.

The JCHR, which comprises MPs and members of the House of Lords, is calling for submissions that address the following questions:

- What are the most significant human rights issues for children in the UK?
- How should the government respond to the UNCRC’s recommendations?
- Which recommendations should be treated as priorities for parliamentary follow-up?

On 14 September, the committee held an evidence session on children’s rights with Anne Longfield, the Children’s Commissioner for England, and Professor Lorna McGregor, the Equality and Humans Rights Commissioner. To read a transcript click here.

Deadline for submissions 7 October

further info
MPs announce inquiry into Troubled Families programme

The Public Accounts Committee has launched an inquiry into the government’s ‘flagship’ Troubled Families programme.

The move follows an investigation by BBC’s Newsnight broadcast in August, which suggested that an unfavourable evaluation of Troubled Families had been ‘suppressed’. Newsnight reported having seen a leaked copy of the ‘final’ evaluation and claimed the government had been sitting on the report since last autumn.

The previous government announced an expansion of the Troubled Families programme in July 2014 following publication of an interim report (see RPU 162).

The PAC is now accepting submissions of written evidence to inform its inquiry. Deadline for submissions 11 October

Editorial note: In August, following the BBC Newsnight investigation, the House of Commons library published a 20-page briefing on the Troubled Families programme.

Lords launch inquiry into the process of making law

The House or Lords Constitution Committee is calling for written evidence to inform its inquiry into the process of making new law.

The inquiry will consider how legislation is prepared within government and scrutinised by Parliament. However, it will also look at the involvement of outside stakeholders and the wider public in the legislative process and consider how their role might be developed, including through the use of new technology.

The inquiry will run for a year and will be divided into four stages: (i) preparing draft legislation for introduction in Parliament; (ii) passage of legislation through Parliament; (iii) the delegation of powers; and (iv) the period after Royal Assent.

The committee is now seeking evidence relating to the first stage. Questions include:

- How effective are current practices in government and Parliament at delivering ‘clear, coherent, effective and accessible’ draft legislation for introduction in Parliament?
- Are there improvements that could be made that would result in legislation that is ‘more easily understandable’ to users and the public?
- To what extent (and how effectively) are those who will be affected by new legislation, and those with expertise that can assist in the development and scrutiny of legislation, engaged and involved in the process?
- What factors inhibit effective engagement? And what mechanisms could be used to increase or improve the engagement of stakeholders?
Could new or existing technologies be used to support the development and scrutiny of new legislation?

How effectively is information about potential legislation disseminated? How could this be improved?

Deadline for submissions 16 October

further info

MPs launch fostering inquiry

The Education Committee has launched an inquiry into fostering in England.

MPs will consider a range of issues, including the recruitment and retention of foster carers as well as concerns about reductions in the number of available foster care places.

The inquiry will also examine support for and treatment of foster carers, the involvement of young people in their care and the increased role of private companies (independent fostering agencies) in providing children's foster care.

The committee is inviting written submissions that address any of the following:

- The recruitment and retention of foster carers, and the capacity of the fostering system.
- Stability of foster care placements, including the impact of Staying Put.
- The role of voluntary and independent foster care providers, and their relationships and cooperation with local authorities.
- The foster care market, including the costs of commissioning services and financial incentives in the recruitment of foster carers.
- The ‘sufficiency of current recognition, support and recompense’ given to foster carers
- Foster care for young people with specific or challenging needs, and its relationship with residential care.
- The involvement of young people in their care, including their role in decision-making.
- What the government should consider in its stock take of foster care.

Committee chair Neil Carmichael said: ‘There are more children in care than at any point since 1985 and there are very real concerns of a shortfall in the number of families available to foster and about the support offered to foster carers. As a committee, we want to identify the main areas where government needs to act to ensure the foster care system in England is fully equipped to provide young people with the loving, stable care they deserve.’

Deadline for submissions: 25 November

further info
‘Schools that work for everyone’: Government consults on creating more ‘good school places’

The government is seeking views on its proposals for creating ‘more good school places’, including allowing selective schools to expand or new ones to open, faith schools to select up to 100 per cent of pupils based on their faith and to introduce new requirements to make sure faith schools include pupils ‘from different backgrounds’.

The government says its ambition is to create ‘an education system that extends opportunity to everyone, not just the privileged few’. The reforms are intended to encourage ‘high-performing institutions – independent schools, higher education institutions, selective and faith schools – to help improve the quality of school places in the mainstream state sector’ by partnering existing schools or setting up new state schools.

Specifically, the consultation covers proposals in four key areas:

1. ‘Independent schools directly assisting the state-funded sector, through creating more good places, and giving parents more choice and control.
2. Universities playing a direct role in improving school quality and pupil attainment.
3. Selective schools providing more school places, and ensuring that they are open to children from all backgrounds.
4. Faith schools delivering more good school places, while meeting strengthened safeguards on inclusivity.’

Responding to the Prime Minister’s announcement, Dave Hill, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, said: ‘There is no evidence to suggest that selection on the basis of academic ability narrows the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils or that grammar schools improve social mobility. Introducing more selection based on achievement creates a more segregated education system and this is particularly concerning when it comes to our most vulnerable learners, including children in care.’

Consultation ends 12 December

further info

HCPC publishes draft guidance on the use of social media

The Health and Care Professions Council is seeking views on draft guidance for social workers and other professionals on the use of social media.

The draft guidance, which includes a list of ‘top tips’, has been developed using feedback from an online workshop. It aims to help social workers and other practitioners feel confident they are meeting expected professional standards when using social media.
The HCPC says it wants to make clear that its expectations of professionals’ behaviour ‘extends to their use of social media, whilst recognising that the vast majority of registrants who use this medium already do so responsibly and without any difficulties at all’.

In 2014, a social worker was sanctioned after posting comments on Facebook about a child protection case, and last year a social worker faced a fitness to practise hearing after sending abusive tweets to the Prime Minister.

Consultation ends 13 January

further info

Parliamentary inquiry will consider the children’s rights implications of Brexit

The Joint Committee on Human Rights is calling for written evidence to inform a new inquiry into the human rights implications of Brexit, including children’s rights.

Withdrawal from the EU could mean that the UK no longer has to comply with the human rights obligations in the EU Treaties and other sources of EU law. For example, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights would not apply and the EU Court of Justice would not have jurisdiction over the UK.

Among other issues, the committee will consider the potential impact of withdrawal on labour rights, disability rights and rights to freedom from discrimination. The committee notes that in the area of children’s rights, for example, ‘there are detailed Directives on the subjects of combating child sexual abuse, exploitation and pornography, and on combating human trafficking’.

JCHR Chair Harriet Harman MP said: ‘EU law provides many important human rights protections. It is vitally important that these are carefully considered in Brexit negotiations, to ensure that we do not weaken any existing human rights protections, especially where these apply to some of the most vulnerable groups in society.’

The committee will also consider the implications of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (which protects privacy and family life) on EU nationals living in the UK and UK nationals currently living in other EU member states.

Deadline for submissions 10 October

Editorial note: The Health Committee has launched an inquiry into priorities for health and social care in the UK’s negotiations on withdrawal from the EU and is inviting views on the ‘risks and opportunities’. Earlier this year, the committee carried out a pre-referendum inquiry into the impact of withdrawal.
Meanwhile, the Women and Equalities Committee is considering the impact of Brexit on equality law and ‘possible ways in which existing protections might be retained and enhanced’ under a new relationship with the EU.

**Reports and Reviews**

**Family debt is adversely affecting children’s mental health, report finds**

Children living in low-income families with multiple debts are at significantly higher risk of suffering poor mental health than those in families who owe money to a single creditor, a new analysis by The Children’s Society has found.

The charity’s report, which is published as part of its ongoing Debt Trap campaign, finds that for families in poverty, the crucial factor is the number of types of debt rather than the total amount owed. The more types of debt, the worse a child’s mental health is likely to be.

The findings suggest that having to juggle a range of creditors, who may all be seeking to reclaim debts at the same time, increases pressure on financially stressed households. Almost one in four children (23%) living in debt-ridden families say they are unhappy with their lives. For some, family debt means not being able to socialise or attend school trips and missing out on holidays. Children also feel embarrassed at not owning things their classmates consider ‘normal’.

The report’s findings are based on an analysis of the Millenium Cohort Study and The Children’s Society’s annual well-being survey, as well as interviews and focus groups with parents, children and young people.

The charity is calling on the government to introduce a statutory ‘breathing space’ scheme to protect families from escalating charges, interest payments and enforcement action until an affordable repayment plan can be put in place. The report also calls for every local authority to develop a debt collection strategy that protects children by making sure families in receipt of council tax reduction are not referred to bailiffs.

The Children’s Society will also be calling on MPs to support Kelly Tolhurst MP’s Private Member’s Bill. The Families with Children and Young People in Debt (Respite) Bill is yet to be published but is scheduled to have its second reading this autumn (Private Member’s Bills are often not printed until close to the second reading debate).

**further info**
Government responds to MPs on mental health of looked after children

The government has published its response to the Education Select Committee’s report on the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children (see RPU 182).

Some specific aspects of the government’s response include:

- **Mental health assessments**: The government does not accept ‘as it stands’ the committee’s recommendation that all looked after children should have a full mental health assessment by a qualified professional. However, the government feels ‘it is sensible to explore this issue further’ and has asked the Expert Working Group for Looked-after Children to explore the issue of specialist mental health assessment taking account of the views and experience of ‘clinicians, experts on children in care, carers and children and young people themselves’.

- **Access to treatment**: The committee reported evidence that CAMHS are often unable to provide care to looked after children because of high thresholds and sometimes refuse to see children who do not have a stable placement. The government agrees that looked after children should receive ‘timely access’ to services and says placement instability ‘should not in itself preclude access to mental health services or specialist consultation and advice’. The issue of access ‘will be addressed by the Expert Working Group who will identify how current arrangements can be improved’.

- **Accessibility beyond age 18**: The government does not accept the committee’s recommendation that CAMHS should be available to all looked after young people up to age 25. ‘Mental health support should be available for those who need it regardless of age’ and the government ‘does not mandate an age range for statutory mental health services for children or adults’. Configuration of local mental health services ‘is a matter for commissioners’.

- **Promoting wellbeing**: The government accepts ‘in principle’ the committee’s recommendation that statutory guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children should be strengthened to incorporate recommendations made in Future in Mind. This is subject to the findings of the Expert Working Group.

- **Prevalence surveys**: The government supports ‘in principle’ the idea of a prevalence survey of children and young people’s mental health being ‘repeated regularly’. Fieldwork on a general prevalence survey of children and young people is due to begin shortly and findings will be published in 2018. The government is also considering ways to improve the evidence base for smaller population groups, including commissioning work to ‘explore the feasibility of a further similar survey’ focusing on looked after children.

- **Schools and mental health services**: The government agrees that the interface between schools and CAMHS ‘can be strengthened’. Outcomes from the pilot of single points of contact are being independently evaluated and will be produced by the end of the year. The Department for Education and NHS England will consider what further action to take in the light of the
evaluation. In the meantime, the government is considering testing how pilot activities can be scaled up within pilot areas to reach more schools.

further info

**MPs publish findings of inquiry into female genital mutilation (FGM)**

It is ‘beyond belief’ that there has been no successful prosecution for an FGM offence since the practice was made illegal 30 years ago, a committee of MPs has said.

In the report of their inquiry into FGM, the Home Affairs Committee describe the failure to prosecute and achieve convictions as ‘a lamentable record’ that can ‘only have negative consequences for those who are brave enough to come forward to highlight this crime’.

The report says the government’s FGM Unit should now be given the ‘remit, powers and budget’ to become ‘the sole source of government policy for safeguarding at-risk girls and eradicating FGM’. Without ‘a powerful, central co-ordinator’, the finite resources available to tackle FGM may not be as well targeted or efficiently used as they should be.

The Unit should be ‘a joint enterprise’ between the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Education in the same way that the Forced Marriage Unit is a joint enterprise between the Home Office and the Foreign Office.

The report also argues that the government was right to introduce mandatory reporting for social workers and other professionals. ‘If a health professional, social worker or teacher saw someone who had been the victim of another crime, they would be expected to report it.’ Prosecutions will not be possible ‘if we wait for daughters to report their parents to the police, which is unlikely to happen’.

The report calls for the introduction of stronger sanctions for professionals who fail to meet the mandatory reporting responsibility. These should go ‘beyond the relevant professions’ own general disciplinary procedures’. The police ‘rely on professionals in the education, health and social care sectors to identify signs that FGM has taken place’.

Other recommendations include:

- **PSHE**: PSHE education should be made compulsory and should cover tackling violence against women and girls, including teaching children about FGM in high-prevalence areas. ‘Such discussions between teachers and pupils would be likely to contribute to increasing the level of reporting and to safeguarding at-risk girls.’
- **Data analysis**: The FGM Unit should publish quarterly reports collating data on the mandatory reporting of FGM. This would encourage further reporting
and ‘would aid data analysis from which examples of best practice can be drawn’.

- **Learning from abroad**: The UK can learn from methods used in other countries (eg, France) to support girls who are willing to give evidence against perpetrators. The Home Office should take steps to investigate additional legislative measures that might help secure more prosecutions and support victims who wish to contribute to legal proceedings, ‘despite the obvious difficulties and conflicts this presents for young women’.

- **International summit**: Within the next 12 months the UK government should reconvene the summit it hosted in summer 2014 and bring together leaders of European countries dealing with FGM. ‘The current Prime Minister took action to tackle FGM when she was Home Secretary and she should take the opportunity to provide global leadership in tackling this form of child abuse.’

**Inspectorates publish report on CSE and missing children**

Ofsted and its fellow inspectorates have published a thematic report setting out the findings of the joint targeted area inspections (JTAsIs) into child sexual exploitation (CSE) and children who go missing (see RPU 179).

All five areas inspected had strategies and plans in place to tackle child sexual exploitation. However, the inspectorates report that collective commitment at a strategic level ‘is not always translating into effective practice’.

Where strategies and plans were found to be effective, agencies ‘were clear about their responsibilities, senior, middle and frontline managers oversaw and implemented plans, and staff had the skills, knowledge and training to recognise and respond to CSE’.

The report finds that raising awareness across communities is vital. ‘The wider community, including parents and carers as well as public services such as transport and recreation and the business community, needs to take responsibility for their role in protecting children.’ Schools in particular have a critical role and children can help develop materials to support other children to understand the risks and issues.

The report also emphasises the importance of children being able to build a relationship with one trusted individual and being actively involved in decisions about their lives. Social workers and health professionals in particular ‘need the time and capacity to build relationships with children if they are to effectively identify children at risk and help protect them’.

Some children had too many professionals involved in their lives. Lack of coordination, and assessments that failed to consider all their needs, meant support for these children ‘was not meaningful to them’. In a small number of cases, professionals had a poor understanding of CSE. ‘This was evident through their inappropriate use of language and affected their ability to engage with children’.
effectively.’ A particular concern was that not all frontline health professionals have the skills needed to identify CSE.

The report also finds that responses to children going missing require further development in most areas visited. More needs to be done to enable the police and children’s social care to have a better understanding of the reasons why children go missing. ‘Understanding of the barriers to ensuring effective responses when children go missing, including making return home interviews work, needs to improve.’

Learning should be shared from those areas that respond well when children go missing and that intervene to prevent children going missing in the first place. The government should commission research to understand the barriers to effective responses to children who go missing and to support a better understanding of the experiences of children. The findings should be used to drive improvements in practice and inform a review of the current statutory guidance.

further info

**MPs call for urgent action to tackle sexual harassment in schools**

The Women and Equalities Committee is calling for ‘urgent’ action to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

In their report, MPs say the evidence they have gathered during their inquiry (see RPU 182) ‘paints a concerning picture’ of sexual harassment of girls ‘being accepted as part of daily life’, primary school children ‘learning about sex and relationships through exposure to hard-core pornography’, and teachers dismissing sexual harassments as ‘just banter’.

While there is insufficient data to demonstrate conclusively that sexual harassment and sexual violence is a growing problem in schools, there is ‘significant qualitative evidence’ that ‘increasing access to pornography and technological advances, including online platforms, can facilitate harassment and violence and thus exacerbate the problem’.

MPs are calling on the government to:

- use the forthcoming Education Bill to create an obligation on every governing body to develop an effective action plan for preventing and responding to sexual harassment and violence
- require Ofsted to assess schools on how well they are ‘recording, monitoring, preventing and responding’ to incidents
- make sex and relationships education (SRE) a statutory subject.

Other recommendations include:
- **Keeping Children Safe**: The government’s Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance should be amended to refer directly to sexual harassment and sexual violence. Specialists in the field should be consulted on the best ways to draft the revisions.

- **Whole-school approach**: The Department for Education should develop national guidance on a whole school approach to reducing and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence in all primary and secondary schools for implementation from September 2017.

- **Data collection and monitoring**: The government should ensure all schools receive clear definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and information on how to record, monitor and respond to incidents, including when to report them to the police. All schools should collect this data, which should be collated nationally and published annually.

- **Ofsted**: Ofsted should update its training and guidance by September 2017 so all schools are inspected on how effectively they are preventing and dealing with sexual harassment and sexual violence. Sexual harassment should be included alongside racist, homophobic and disability-based bullying in Ofsted guidance.

- **Masculinity and SRE**: Sex and Relationships Education ‘must be broadened to challenge harmful notions of masculinity and reflect boys’ experiences’. The report welcomes the government’s ‘interest in supporting boys and young men to be part of the solution to the problem of sexual harassment and sexual violence’ and calls on the government to fund research to establish the most effective ways to achieve this.

- **Pornography**: The government should update its guidance on SRE to include teaching about pornography and advise schools on how to approach this topic in an age appropriate way. This should include how schools can work ‘in partnership with parents to address the impact of pornography on children’s perceptions of sex, relationships and consent’.

- **Specialist organisations**: Specialist sector organisations play an important role in delivering high quality SRE, as well as supporting schools and pupils when disclosures about sexual harassment or violence are made. It is ‘essential’ they are able to access adequate resources to continue to do so. The government should create a new fund to support those organisations to use their expertise to support schools.

**Editorial note**: The NSPCC has published advice for professionals working with children and young people on developing and implementing effective policies and procedures for dealing with sexting and what to do when a young person makes a disclosure.

[Further info](#)
School nurses are spending twice as much time on paperwork as they do on direct work with children, which may also be reducing their ability to identify children at risk of neglect or abuse, according to a new report by the Children’s Commissioner.

The report, which is based on the findings of a survey of 775 primary and secondary school nurses, found that safeguarding and child protection duties form a substantial part of school nurses’ duties. However, many school nurses (41%) feel child protection thresholds are set too high and report that their concerns are often not acted on by children’s social care.

Many nurses feel better guidance could be given on how to make a referral, including the evidential standards needed to ensure referrals are accepted. With children at risk or in need of support ‘being turned away’, many nurses report being left with ‘significant child protection concerns, without the power to intervene’.

One school nurse said the threshold seemed to be getting ‘higher and higher all the time. I think the thresholds are higher because the social workers are overwhelmed. More social workers and early social help funding would improve the situation.’

**Young people anxious and pessimistic about the future, survey finds**

Serious financial pressures and work-related problems are leaving many young people anxious, stressed and pessimistic about the future, according to a new report from the Young Women’s Trust.

The report draws on the findings of a survey of 4,000 18 to 30-year-olds. Over half the young people (51%) said they felt worried for the future (55% of young women, 47% of young men). This marks a significant deterioration since the Trust’s 2015 annual survey when one in three (33%) said they felt worried for the future (38% of young women and 28% of young men).

Almost half (46%) the young women also said they felt ‘worn down’ (compared to 38% of young men) and nearly one in four (38%) said they were worried about their mental health (29% of young men). Young women (54%) were far more likely than young men (39%) to say they lacked self-confidence.

More than one in five young people (22%) described themselves as feeling depressed (22% of young women, 21% of young men). However, this increased to one in three (35%) among young people in socio-economic group DE.

Three in ten respondents also said they had been offered a zero-hours contract, more than one in five (22%) had been paid less than the minimum wage and almost half (48%) worried about how much their job pays.

The Young Women’s Trust is calling on the government to commit to moving towards extending the National Living Wage to under-25s and to appoint a minister...
with responsibility for overall youth policy, including employment. The charity also wants to see JobCentre Plus providing more support to boost young people’s emotional wellbeing and confidence.

Editorial note: The NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014, which was published at the end of September, reports that the ‘gender gap in mental illness’ has become ‘most pronounced in young people’. The survey, which measures ‘treated and untreated psychiatric disorder’ among the adult (aged 16 and over) population, found that one in five 16 to 24-year-old women reported having self-harmed at some point in their life. Young women of the same age also had high rates of screening for posttraumatic stress disorder (12.6%, compared with 3.6% of young men).

This is the fourth psychiatric morbidity survey; previous surveys were conducted in 1993, 2000 and 2007.

further info

Initiatives and Guidance

Child Sexual Exploitation Response Unit launched

The government has provided £1.24 million to set up a Child Sexual Exploitation Response Unit to offer tailored support to local areas to tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The Unit will be run by NWG Network (formerly The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People), a national charity based in Derby. It will be able to provide support to practitioners working on individual cases, as well as to managers developing a strategy for preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation.

NWG Network’s Chief Executive Sheila Taylor said the Unit is developing ‘a register of skills and knowledge’ identifying professionals across the country who can share learning and assist local areas to develop and improve their response to young people and parents.

Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, Edward Timpson, said: ‘The Response Unit will ensure specialist support is made available to people working in children’s safeguarding across the country, enabling them to provide a strong and robust first response to children and families who are victims of child sexual exploitation.’

further info

University of Bedfordshire launches Contextual Safeguarding Network
The University of Bedfordshire’s International Centre has launched the Contextual Safeguarding Network.

The network will bring together practitioners from across the UK to share and develop knowledge on contextual approaches to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and exploitation.

Contextual safeguarding recognises that children and young people can experience abuse and significant harm in an extra-familial context and aims to include such contexts within policy and practice on prevention, identification, assessment and intervention. Extra-familial contexts include peer groups, educational settings and community spaces, such as parks and shopping centres.

The network intends to promote theory-informed practice and practice-informed research ‘co-created with academics and practitioners’. Membership is free and open to practitioners in the UK who work with young people, commissioners, services managers and policy-makers.

further info

**Statutory guidance on children missing education**

The government has published revised statutory guidance for local authorities on children missing education (see RPU 179).

Under the new guidance, all schools must notify their local authority when they are about to remove a pupil’s make from the school admission register. Schools must also make ‘reasonable enquiries’ to establish the whereabouts of a child (jointly with the local authority) before deleting a pupil’s name from the register.

Schools must also notify the local authority when adding a pupil’s name to the register at a non-standard transition point.

further info

**Guidance on supporting people with learning disabilities and poor mental health**
NICE has published guidance on the prevention, assessment and management of mental health problems in children, young people and adults with learning disabilities.

The guideline covers people ‘with any degree of learning disabilities’. It includes recommendations relating to the delivery of care and support, support for family and carers, the social and physical environment, identification and referral, assessment and interventions.

Among other recommendations, the guideline urges health, social care and education services to consider the impact of the social and physical environment on the mental health of children and young people with learning disabilities when developing care plans. In particular, special consideration and support should be given to looked after children (and their foster parents or care workers) to ‘reduce the child or young person’s very high risk of developing mental health problems, and the risk of changes in their home and carers’.

The guideline notes that mental health problems are often overlooked in people with learning disabilities. This includes common problems such as depression and anxiety disorders. NICE makes a number of research recommendations, including large randomised controlled trials to establish what psychological interventions (eg, CBT and interpersonal therapy) are effective for treating internalising disorders in children and young people with learning disabilities.

further info

**NICE launches guideline on harmful sexual behaviour**

NICE has launched its guideline for practitioners on helping children and young people who display harmful sexual behavior (HSB).

The guideline relates mainly to young people between the ages of 10 and 18, but covers also young people up to age 25 who have a disability or special educational needs. The guidance is aimed at social workers, residential care staff and foster carers, CAMHS practitioners, schools and youth services, as well as those working in primary health, sexual health services, and drug and alcohol services.

The guidance emphasises that as many young people will grow out of the harmful behaviours, it is vital that they are not unnecessarily stigmatised.

Jon Brown, Head of Development and Impact at NSPCC and member of the Guideline Development Group, said: ‘There are three key messages in the guidance:

1. Children and young people should be treated as just that, not as mini sex offenders.
2. The approach should be shaped to the individual – it’s not a one size fits all process.'
3. And steps to change behaviour will only be effective if the family and support network understand there is an issue and are supportive.

The guideline calls for a joined up approach by universal services, child health services, children’s social services and the voluntary sector when responding to concerns about a child or young person’s sexual behaviour. Recommendations include:

- Named safeguarding leads (in universal services such as schools) should use locally agreed resources to assess concerns about the sexual behaviour of a child or young person.
- Practitioners should use risk assessment tools that are suitable for the child or young person’s developmental age and gender.
- Practitioners should consider engaging with families and carers before beginning an intervention.
- Care plans should be designed and interventions structured to meet the needs of the individual child or young person.

The guidance also makes a number of research recommendations, including:

- **Long-term outcomes**: Longitudinal evidence across the life-course is needed to understand when to intervene, particularly for young people whose behaviour does not warrant an intervention from HSB services or the CJS. Evidence is also needed on modifiable risk and protective factors that prevent escalation, and on quality of life measures.
- **What interventions are most effective?** Most current evidence is drawn from small clinical populations of adolescent males convicted of sexual offences. More research is needed on how to avoid young people who display HSB being taken into the CJS. This includes research relating to prepubescent children, young people learning disabilities, minority ethnic communities and looked after children. Evidence on interventions for looked after children should include those in non-family based settings and unstable foster care.
- **What therapeutic interventions are effective when working with families and carers?** Evidence on effective interventions for families and carers is equivocal. Evidence of effectiveness for the two most common approaches (CBT and multisystemic therapy) and other therapies is ‘very limited’. Further research is needed to help practitioners tailor interventions according to need.
- **What interventions are effective in diverting young people away from HSB before a legal response is needed?** More evidence is needed on what is effective in diverting young people away from further HSB at the earliest stages. Research is needed on missed opportunities to intervene and what the trajectory has been for children and young people who were ‘missed’.
- **How effective are current models for assessing the needs of, and level of risk for, different population groups displaying HSB?** Risk assessment tools have mainly been used on small clinical populations who have sexually offended. Assessment tools are needed for other groups. Assessment results are also a basis for needs assessment and decisions about therapeutic interventions, treatment placements and care plans. Lack of evidence on
current assessment models means little is known about the problems caused by mislabelling a young person, the impact of the assessment process on the young person and their family, and treatment outcomes.

- **How does the use of electronic media affect HSB?** Few studies have examined the links between aggressive behaviour, sexual offending and the use of electronic media. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand the impact electronic media has on sexual behaviour and on young people’s general values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. Research is also needed on its long-term impact on children’s social and psychological development.