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What is Residential Child Care and why does it matter?

This post-election briefing for councillors, new and old, is written by independent experienced experts in Residential Child Care.

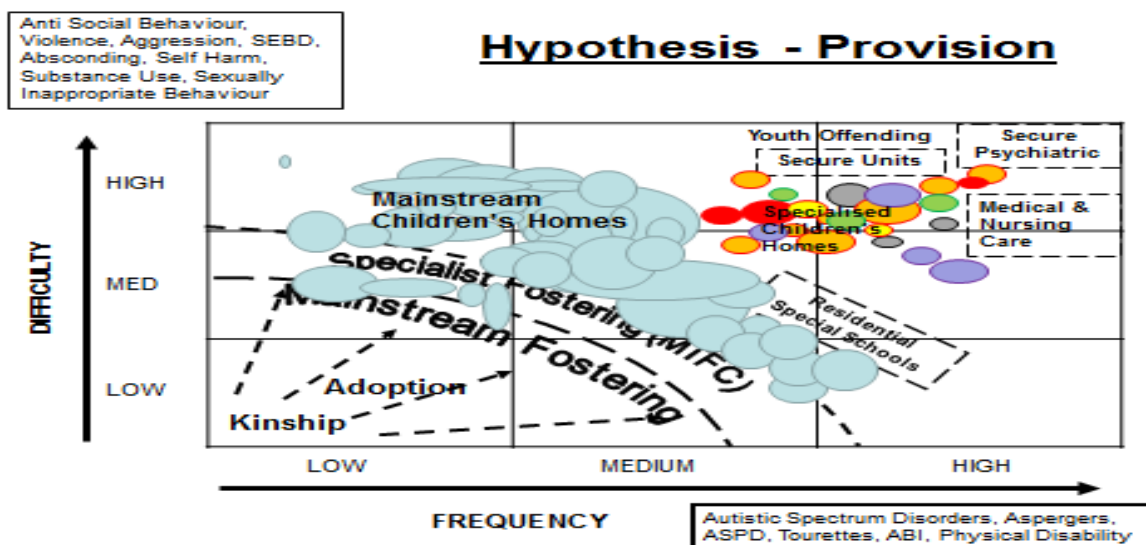
It is distillation of the evidence and knowledge base and has previously been shared with the DfE, Education Select Committee, and Public Accounts Select Committee.

Residential care is not displaced demand for fostering. The need for fostering and Residential Child Care arise in diverse ways. Some needs arise from poverty, neglect, and deprivation, often occurring earlier, and others arise from abuse, trauma, exploitation, often occurring later.

So, there are 3 groupings of children in care and placements that match.

- Children with relatively simple or straightforward needs who require either short-term or relatively 'ordinary' substitute care (likely kinship or fostering)
- Children with deep rooted, complex, or chronic needs with a long history of difficulty and disruption, including abuse or neglect requiring more than simply a substitute family (mainstream 'family group' type homes providing supportive developmental and maturational opportunity)
- Children with extensive, complex, and enduring needs compounded by very difficult behaviour who require more specialised and intensive resources (identifiably treatment orientated – therapeutic, secure, psychiatric, disability)

Understanding the frequency and the difficulty of meeting needs - appreciating they require a full and differentiated range of responses specific for each child.



Every child referred should be referred to the home that is the most appropriate placement matching provision to needs. Diverse provision is necessary, each home needs appreciating as unique.

Lessons from research - positive Residential Child Care and how to achieve it.

In brief, a range of carers can support a child to make and keep relationships, feel and be safe. Families are important, but some children need more than a family sometimes in their life.

Understanding the complexity of needs of children

The children will often have had many family-based/fostering places, being moved several times, often 3 or more in a year, some 5 or more.

Their needs are often significant emotionally, socially, and behaviourally, and affect their engagement with education. On arriving at a home, they may have lower levels of educational engagement, advancement, and achievement than other children, however, educational growth can be rapid once having a place to live meeting needs.

Their well-being and mental health may have been affected more than other children by adverse childhood experiences, abuse and neglect, and may not have been recognised before.

The potential for risk needs to be understood, recognised, anticipated, managed. Frequency and difficulty reduce with the making of trusted loving relationships. Some risks are externalised behaviourally, some are internalised depression, eating disorders, substance abuse.

The majority are aged over 12 and around two-thirds are boys; the average age of a child in a children's home is around 15. Earlier intervention would have been in their interest. Planned placements bring positive outcomes.

Many stays are shorter than beneficial (England uses its residential care short term rather than longer term recovery as in other countries)

Key ingredients of residential care linked to positive outcomes for children.

- Positive residential child care is found in positive children's services providing a supportive environment for the benefits of residential care to be optimised.
- Residential care seen as part of the continuum of care (see diagram) where a child's needs are regularly assessed and monitored, and this information is used to decide which services a child needs; part of this continuum of care may include a residential placement with the type and length of placement being determined by the child's needs;
- Positive relationships between children and carers, and children themselves.

- Working with families before, during and after the residential placement and involving children and their families in decisions about children’s lives while they are in a residential placement.
- Providing a ‘normal life’ environment where children feel safe and having access to the same range of support, activities, and opportunities as other children.

The hallmarks of quality residential child care

- Clarity of vision and purpose for the setting.
- Leadership with a clear plan for implementing the vision.
- Staff with the skills, qualifications, experience, and motivation to implement the vision and to deliver effective residential practice.
- Good interagency working
- Small ‘family-like’ settings; homes providing leisure and academic activities and support; the availability of good food; and last, but not least, safe settings,

What the children need from the people providing Residential Child Care is the opportunity for ‘Caring for: Caring about: Caring with.’

Caring for includes hands-on care. Caring about describes our relationships with others. Caring with describes how we act together to transform our world.

So, what do Residential Child Care workers do?

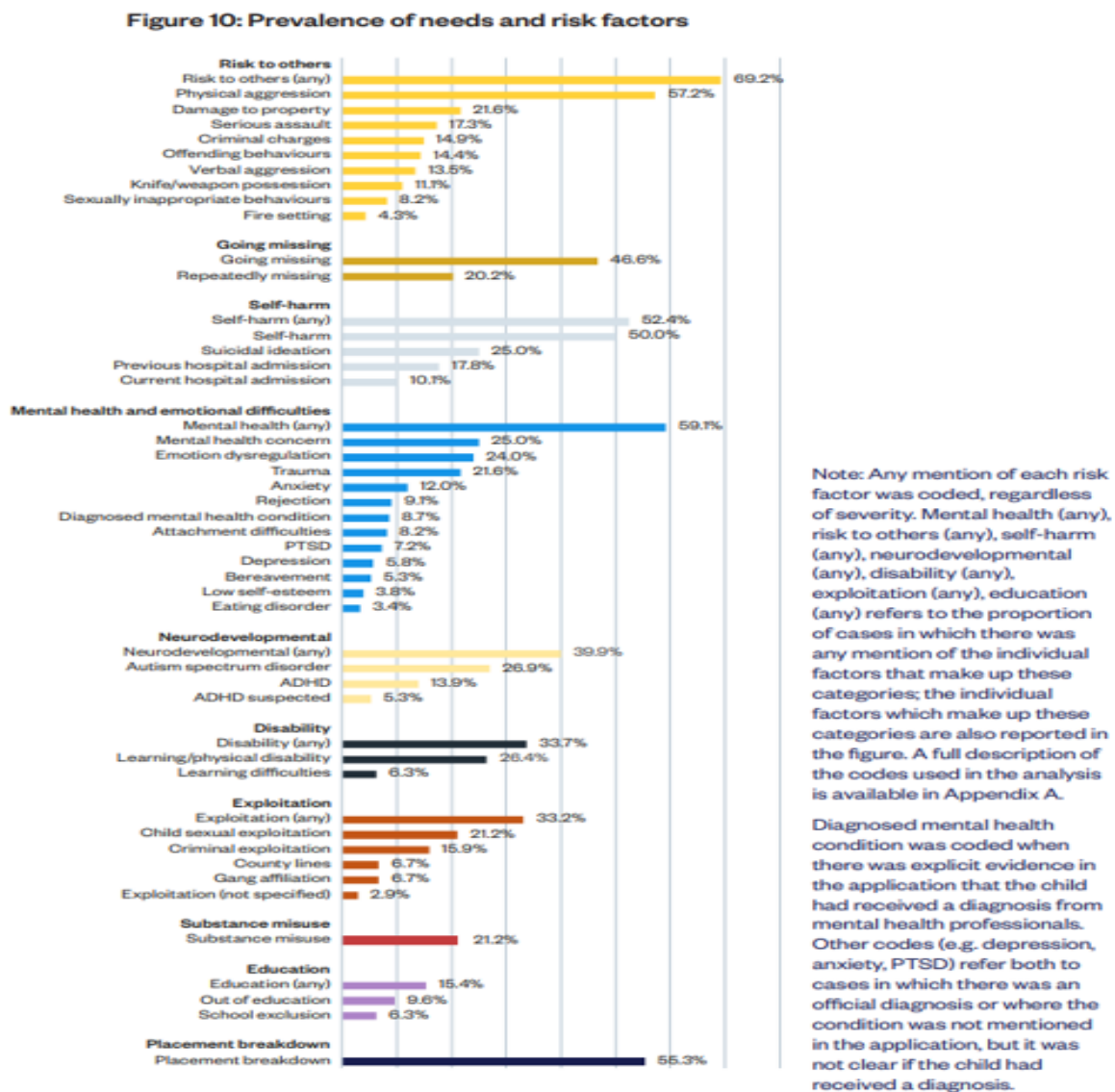


There are children with the highest needs who may need a home solely for one child with a team of carers (sometimes requiring Deprivation of Liberty - DOLs)

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (NFJO) have observed children having multiple, co-occurring, and interacting needs.

The NFJO identified 11 main categories that reflected the range of needs and risk factors: risk to others, going missing, self-harm, mental health concerns, neurodevelopmental disorders, disability, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, substance misuse, placement breakdown and being out of education.

In an overwhelming majority of cases (95.2%) an average of 4.2 risk factors present in each case) had more than one risk factor recorded in the application and most (65.7%) had four or more



This table from [Children deprived of their liberty: An analysis of the first two months of applications to the national deprivation of liberty court – Nuffield Family Justice Observatory \(nuffieldfjo.org.uk\)](https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk)

