

'Looking Beyond the Label'

Public attitudes towards young people in care

The Prince's Trust



Prince's Trust

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Introduction

The Prince's Trust aims to help young people get their lives working by building up confidence and providing new opportunities through a range of programmes, grants and mentoring support.

We target those young people in society who are particularly disadvantaged and young people 'in and leaving care' are one of our priority target groups, along with the unemployed, ex-offenders and educational under-achievers.

Our goal for people leaving care is that they have the same start in life as their peers - which is currently not the case. So in support of the aims of the BBC season 'Taking Care' The Prince's Trust commissioned a public opinion poll to explore attitudes towards care which would provide a context to promote a greater understanding of the challenges they face.

This report is a summary of a survey conducted by ICM Research Limited (ICM) for The Prince's Trust. A sample of 1003 adults, aged 18+, were interviewed across the country and the results weighted to the profile of all adults. Comparisons are also made with a similar poll by MORI in 2000. The poll was commissioned by The Prince's Trust with support from Abbey.

Last year The Prince's Trust and its partners helped over 33,000 young people through mentoring, training and grants. 2,100 of these were children and young people in and leaving care.

For more information about the work of The Prince's Trust for those from care see www.princes-trust.org.uk/care

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Look beyond the label

What do people know and think about children from care?

What kind of response can children and young people expect when they reveal their care history? Do we expect them to be more likely to succeed or fail?

A report by A National Voice (the user led organisation for those in care in England) reported that many experience stigma because of their 'care status'. Labelled with stereotypes associated with negative outcomes, many expect less of themselves for the future.

Research and Government statistics demonstrate that the 8,000 careleavers who move on from foster care and children's homes every year in the UK will do so before they are aged 19 and will be over-represented in the statistics of exclusion - low educational achievement, homelessness, unemployment, and crime.

These findings, whilst necessary to highlight the reason why Government and the voluntary sector would want to provide additional support, can also contribute to a negative stereotype that stigmatises many of the young people and negatively influences the expectations of those around them.

The label that highlights the barriers they face can also become a barrier in itself, especially if the negative statistics are the only message about care that are shared.

In fact the findings of this poll indicate that there is a great deal of positive support from the public, with as many as 80% believing that those in care have as much potential as their peers. Whilst there is still misunderstanding about the care system itself (with many still thinking that most people in care live in children's homes and that fostering is not being in care at all) the majority believe that the offer of mentoring support and prioritising employment opportunities will make a difference.

When compared with a similar poll over three years ago, there are indicators that attitudes are changing. A greater proportion have positive feelings. However the proportion who think that they will suffer prejudice in their adult lives, whilst down from 53%, is still high at 39%.

This survey highlights the potential for community support in improving the situation and provides a context for challenging some of the myths that might hold back people from getting their lives working. It is intended to provide a reference point for policy makers, service-providers and young people themselves to be more prepared in planning their move from the care system to life in the community.

More should be done to raise awareness of the circumstances and challenges faced by young people in care, and to explore new ways of translating sympathy into support. Research is needed to see what impact these attitudes have on those who were in care

Summary of Key Findings

The poll was conducted by ICM in November 2003 with a sample of 1003. Comparisons are with a poll conducted by MORI¹ in February 2000 with a sample 1011.

The Care System

Numbers

- Most people are unaware of the number of children in care in the UK. Only 12% correctly thought that there were 50-100,000.

There are approximately 77,000² in care throughout the UK.

Children's Homes

- One third of people thought that most children in care live in children's homes.

Only 10% of children in care live in residential units or homes³ – the same percentage as those placed at home with their families.

Fostering

- 30% thought children who are fostered are not in care at all.

Most children in care, 68%, are fostered; 10% live in children's homes; 10% with parents, 6% adoption – DfES 2003.

Education

- 50% disagreed and 34% agreed with the statement that young people in care don't do well in school.

Whilst the statistics show that as many as 56% will not have a GCSE or NVQ compared with approximately 4% of their peers, this finding suggests that a greater proportion of people have a positive expectation of those from care. The issues and reasons why young people are less likely to succeed at school are explored in a recent Social Exclusion Unit report – A Better Education for children in care 2003.

Crime

- 43% disagreed and 41% agreed with the statement that young people in care were far more likely to be involved in crime

10% of children in care aged 10 and over were cautioned or convicted of an offence - three times that of their peers.⁴ Whilst the findings were evenly divided on this issue if it is compared with a similar poll three years ago the proportion who disagreed had risen from 29% to 45% reflecting a more positive trend in expectations.

¹ Commissioned by The Prince's Trust Camelot Foundation leaving care initiative.

² Prince's Trust – total for UK compiled from statistics published by DOH, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly and NI Statistical office.

³ DfES Bulletin Children Looked After, England 2002-2003

⁴ DOH Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children, September 2002

Employment

→ 35% agreed and 49% disagreed with the statement that people who have been in care are more likely to be unemployed.

According to DfES figures for England 2002-2003, 39% were not in education training or employment at the age of nineteen.

Attitudes to people from care

Knowing someone from care

→ One in three people personally know someone who was in or leaving care.

This figure was sought to put the other findings in context. Whilst many people will get information from the media their personal experience with people from care will also influence their attitudes. 55 per 10,000 children were in care in England on 31 March 2003⁵ (1 in 181). Over the course of a year 1 in 120 children, will spend time in care.

Facing Prejudice

→ 39% agreed with the statement that young people who have been in care face prejudice throughout their adult lives.

Young people themselves feel they are treated differently because of their care status⁶. However this percentage is considerably down on the 53% three years ago.

→ 86% of people disagreed with the statement 'I would not want someone who has been in care working for me'.

Most people would not discriminate against someone who has been in care when it comes to giving them a job. However six per cent agreed with this statement.

Potential

→ 80% of people believe that young people in care have as much potential as their peers to succeed.

Feelings towards

→ When asked to choose which two words best described their feelings towards someone who has been in care most people chose 'sympathetic' (49%) and 'supportive' (46%).

Whilst this was a lower percentage than three years ago the other 'votes' were redistributed to increase other positive feelings – hope and optimism, and decrease on negative ones – fearful and suspicious

People are more hopeful (up from 33% to 38%) and more optimistic (up from 17% to 28%) yet more feel more sad (up from 12% to 16%) than three years ago. They are also less fearful (down from 8% to 3%) and less suspicious (down from 7% to 3%) than they were three years ago.

⁵ DfES Bulletin Children Looked After, England 2002-2003

⁶ Amplify Report – A National Voice 2003

Helping those from care

In 2002-2003 The Prince's Trust helped over 2100 people in or leaving care through its training, grants and mentoring opportunities. These included 550 aged 16-21, who were given advice and encouragement by a network of volunteer mentors in over 40 partnership projects.

In this section the poll asked about ways in which people leaving care should be helped by The Prince's Trust.

Priorities

→ When asked which two ways of supporting young in care the Prince's Trust should prioritise, most people prioritised help with finding employment, followed by help to pay for further education and training.

Help to find employment	63%
Help to pay for further education or training	60%
Offering a mentor	29%
Offering a personal development course	27%
Helping to set up in business	12%

Those who knew someone from care prioritised education and training over employment.

Mentoring

Two questions were asked about mentoring which was defined as volunteers offering advice and encouragement.

- 95% thought that, in principle, volunteer mentoring, should be a service that is available to all careleavers
- 88% thought that mentoring should generally be available to all young people in society.

Mentoring is the availability of one-to-one advice and encouragement to inspire young people to succeed by exploring opportunities, realising potential and achieving individual goals, particularly at a time of transition and opportunity and typically over a sustained period.

Mentoring is a concept which is increasingly used to support marginalised young people and is central to the work of The Prince's Trust.

Questions and Tables

ICM poll, November 2003
Sample 1003

Note: percentages are of respondents

Q1. How many people do you think there are in care in the UK?

Less than 500	1%
500 –1000	2%
1,000-10,000	13%
10,000-50,000	18%
50,000-100,000	12%
Over 100,000	24%
Don't Know	30%

Q2. Do you personally know someone either in care, or who has been in care?

	Total	Age of sample surveyed					
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes	31%	45%	38%	30%	28%	29%	25%
No	68%	55%	62%	62%	72%	71%	75%

Q3. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"Most children in care live in children's homes"

Net Agree	33%
Strongly agree	9%
Tend to agree	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%
Tend to disagree	32%
Strongly disagree	13%
Net Disagree	45%
Don't know	11%

Q4. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Children who are fostered are not in care”

Net Agree	30%
Strongly agree	10%
Tend to agree	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%
Tend to disagree	31%
Strongly disagree	22%
Net Disagree	53%
Don't know	10%

Q5. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“People who have been in care don't do as well at school”

Net Agree	34%
Strongly agree	7%
Tend to agree	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%
Tend to disagree	24%
Strongly disagree	27%
Net Disagree	50%
Don't know	6%

Q6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“People who have been in care are more likely to be unemployed”

Net Agree	35%
Strongly agree	8%
Tend to agree	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%
Tend to disagree	29%
Strongly disagree	20%
Net Disagree	49%
Don't know	6%

Q7. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"Young people in care have as much potential as their peers to succeed"

Net Agree	80%
Strongly agree	46 %
Tend to agree	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%
Tend to disagree	9%
Strongly disagree	5%
Net Disagree	14%
Don't know	3%

Changing attitudes to Care

November 2003 (sample 1003) compared with February 2000 (sample 1011)

Q8. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"Most young people who have been in care face prejudice through their adult life"

	2003	2000
Net Agree	39%	53%
Strongly agree	13%	14%
Tend to agree	26%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	13%
Tend to disagree	30%	25%
Strongly disagree	17%	3%
Net Disagree	46%	28%
Don't know/No opinion	5%	5%

"I would not want someone who has been in care working for me"

	2003	2000
Net Agree	6%	6%
Strongly agree	3%	2%
Tend to agree	3%	4%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	10%
Tend to disagree	21%	38%
Strongly disagree	65%	43%
Net Disagree	86%	81%
Don't know/No opinion	2%	3%

Q9. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Continued)

“Young people who are in care are far more likely to be involved in crime”

	2003	2000
Net Agree	41%	45%
Strongly agree	10%	9%
Tend to agree	31%	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	21%
Tend to disagree	29%	23%
Strongly disagree	15%	6%
Net Disagree	43%	29%
Don't know/No opinion	4%	5%

Q10 Which two of these words best describe your feelings towards someone who has been in care?

	2003	2000
Sympathetic	49%	53%
Supportive	46%	53%
Hopeful	38%	33%
Optimistic	28%	17%
Sad	16%	12%
Fearful	3%	8%
Suspicious	3%	7%
Distrustful	2%	3%
None of these	1%	1%
Don't know	2%	3%

Q11. Which two of the following ways of supporting young people in care do you think The Prince's Trust should prioritise?

	Whole Sample	Know someone in care/been in care	
		Yes	No
Helping them find employment	63%	58%	66%
Helping to pay for further education or training	60%	65%	58%
Offering them a mentor	29%	32%	28%
Offering them personal development courses	27%	27%	26%
Helping them set up in business	12%	9%	13%
None of these	<1	<1	<1
Don't know	2%	1%	2%

Q12. The Prince's Trust has set up a volunteer mentoring network to give advice and encouragement to some of the young people leaving care in the UK. In principle, do you think this should be a service available to all care leavers, or not?

Yes	95%
No	2%
Don't Know	3%

Q13. Do you think mentoring should be available for all young people, or not?

	Percentage	Number
Yes	88%	883
No	7%	73
Don't Know	5%	47
Total	100%	1003

Notes:

The 'Young People in Care' Survey and initial analysis for The Prince's Trust was prepared by ICM Research Limited in December 2003. This summary and its conclusions were prepared by The Prince's Trust in January 2004.

Young People in Care 2000 survey prepared by The Camelot Foundation Prince's Trust Leaving Care Initiative in March 2000. This comparative analysis was prepared by The Prince's Trust in 2004.

Field work

Dates	Original Survey	Sample
21-23 November 2003	Young People in Care Survey ICM	1003
24-29 February 2000	Young People in Care, MORI	1011