

Design a person-centred service for vulnerable children. Include a critical evaluation of different types of person-centred planning.

This essay will explore differing view points on the use of person-centred planning used to help vulnerable children and young people. The essay will focus on a service aimed to promote social inclusion to Looked after children. This vulnerable group are found to be severely disadvantaged in education as well as within the job market, and due to having to leave residential care at just eighteen, the initiative is aimed to help these young people enter employment or continue on a path of further education. Person-centred planning refers to a family of approaches aimed at enabling people who use services to plan their own futures and to get the services that they need (Dowling, 2006, pp.1).

The White Paper introduced in 2001 identified person-centred planning as a central component in being able to deliver and promote four key principles- rights, independence, choice and inclusion (Mansell and Beadle-Brown, 2005, pp.19). O'Brien and O'Brien (2000) believes that PCP is a series of approaches aimed to help an individual. Mansell and Beadle-Brown (2005) develop this by explaining how PCP is about assessing and organising an approach which can best help that person and their unique needs. Crocker (1990, as cited in Mansell and Beadle-Brown, 2005, pp.20) looked in depth into PCP, with the approach having three main aims, the first looking closely at what that individual wants for their future, what are their hopes and dreams, as well as their aspirations. Negatives of this however according to Crocker (1990, as cited in Mansell and Beadle-Brown, 2005, pp.20) are that these aspirations can often be expressed by that young person's advocator and not themselves, but also the fact that these dreams are simply what they want and not what they may need. This creates artificial hurdles between goals in an inappropriate readiness model (Wilcox and Bellamy, 1987, as cited in Mansell and Beadle-Brown, 2005, pp. 20). Secondly, within the PCP process, it is quintessential for family support as Mansell and Beadle-Brown (2005) believe that no one knows that individual better than their closest family. Sanderson (2000) agrees and believes that a good relationship between the family and service professionals is essential to the PCP approach being a success. The last aim according to Mansell and Beadle-Brown

(2005) is that that individual and their family receives the support they need, in enabling the approach to work. Person centred planning cannot be truly effective without a circle of support (Sanderson, 2000, pp.11).

A Looked After Child was first defined in the 1989 Children's Act, whereby Government believes it defines any looked after child or young person who is either voluntarily accommodated or subject to a 'care order' (Soan, 2010, pp.12). Research has shown that within education a LAC child is more likely to be disadvantaged within education compared to their peers, as Harker et al (2004) discovered that around a quarter (27%) of LAC children have an identified Special Educational Need, having an affect on their attainment. The link between LAC and poor educational attainment was first found in 1987 as Jackson (1987, as cited in Jackson and Hojer, 2013, pp.2) believed the gap between the care and education systems was found as the main reason for these children's poor educational outcomes. Hojer (2008, as cited in Jackson and Hojer, 2013, pp.2) found that these children' educational pathways after leaving compulsory education is relatively unknown, with no research looking at the percentage of LAC going into higher education or finding employment. With this being said, researchers believe no one knows these statistics as LAC make up such as small percentage within the job market, with very few LAC going onto further study.

Chase et al (2013) found that LAC can experience a range of disadvantages including, experiencing a bad educational experience, poor future life opportunities as well as an impact on their social, physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, a LAC is seven times than a non-LAC child to abuse or misuse drugs, fifty times more likely to go to prison for a crime committed and sixty times more likely to end up homeless at one stage in their life (Jackson and Simon, 2005, p.2). Their high percentage in illegal activity can be linked with their low level of educational success. The Department of Education (2016) reported that just thirteen point six per cent of LAC achieved five GCSE's A*-C including Maths and English, a drop from thirteen point nine per cent from the previous year. Despite being worryingly low, the statistic has only fallen from eight years previous in 2008, as the Department for Children, schools and families (2008) found that fourteen per cent of LAC children obtained five GCSE's A*-C, compared to sixty five per cent as the national average. This shows that although within the media there is a large emphasis on improving

attainment with ethnic minorities and those with EAL, LAC are being forgotten as this group is one of the lowest achieving groups in education.

Costa (2009) believes their low educational attainment is down to have a lack of positive attachments growing up and this as a result has an affect on their motivation to succeed in school. Jackson and Martin (1998, as cited in Costa, 2009, pp.20) found that those LAC who did well academically credited their success down to their carer who valued education and encouraged the importance of going to school and completing homework. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) completed a study into LAC children and found that often their teachers, social workers and carers have low expectations for them academically and did not push them enough to reach their potential causing them to attain poorly.

One PCP approach is the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) which brings together a group of people who help to identify the focus on service user's talents and needs (Dowling, 2006, pp.6). According to Sanderson (2000) the MAPS approach has eight steps, with the approach being person-centred and aiming to ensure the service user achieves their desired goal/dream. Sanderson (2000) discusses how an Action Plan is used to ensure the goal remains achievable, with the service user and service professionals having regular meetings to discuss progress. Learning Disability Wales (2012) discuss some positives of the MAPS approach, whereby facilitators will never judge an individual's dream, even if it seems impossible, with practitioners often aiming to play parts of a dream out. Furthermore, MAPS is a wonderful way to 'get to know' someone, in schools, in communities, in life (Inclusion Press, no date, p.3). These regular meetings between service user and practitioner allow a relationship to build, and for that practitioner to understand and believe in that individual's dream and how best to work toward that dream. With family support, the MAPS approach allows these meetings to be purely focused on meeting and achieving that person's dream.

There are negatives however of the MAPS approach, as Holburn and Vietze (2002) found that there are limited number of practitioners qualified to undertake the MAPS process, as a result, these professionals are viewing a large number of young people each week. Because of this Holburn and Vietze (2002) found that this has resulted in a lack of attention to a person's individual plan, with a lack of detail often resulting in

a MAPS plan not being as thorough as it could be. This can also have an impact as these practitioners are viewing such a high number of individuals, meetings between individual service users may not be as regular as liked, with it difficult to stay on track with each person's action plan. Robertson et al (2007, as cited in Hughes, 2013, pp.13) agrees as problems often lie with the facilitator, as a lack of time in arranging suitable meetings as well as limited service availability result in PCP not being that effective. Kinsella (2000) believes that PCP approaches like MAPS often have a lack of funding, meaning certain individual's dreams are simply not possible because of the cost entailed in being able to achieve the dream. As a result, the approach maintains people in inappropriate services, leading miserable or unfulfilling lives under the presence that it is cost effective (Kinsella, 2000, pp.10). Furthermore, Robertson et al (2007, as cited in Hughes, 2013, pp.14) found there is little to no evidence which shows the effectiveness of any PCP approach in helping young people.

Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) according to Sanderson (2015) is staged into seven steps, with the approach centred on present day and looking forward to the future to reach that individual's desired goal. PATH involves future planning for families, organizations and schools to build caring "including" places to live, work & learn (Inclusion Press, no date, p.1). A key to this planning process is identifying who will be responsible to do what to help achieve a person's goals (Kirklees Gov, no date, pp.2). Haycock (2015) completed a study of a group of individuals who had all been recently been in receipt of the PATH approach and spoke of how all of their lives had improved as a result of PATH. Haycock (2015) found that new friendships had been build as well as their own confidence because of PATH. O'Brien et al (2008, as cited in Haycock, 2015, pp.12) agrees and found the PATH approach improved an individual's confidence, their outlook for their future as well as self-esteem. Haycock (2015) also found that within the individuals having a large and bright poster with their individual dreams, helped them want to achieve them that bit more, and so as it as a motivation having them up on their walls to look at every day.

Haycock (2015) however found there were drawbacks to the PATH approach as after six months of the PATH plan, there are no more meet ups to discuss staying on track and looking forward to the future. Haycock (2015) found the interviewees

believed it would have been beneficial for a meeting after a year, as parents and the child had often forgotten most of the PATH process. Carnaby and Lewis (2005, as cited in Haycock, 2015, pp.50) agree and believe a meeting after a year would be beneficial in order for that individual to transition into their improved life more easily. Despite this, Haycock's (2015) research firmly believed that PATH had been an effective tool in promoting empowerment and autonomy.

The service is available to LAC aged between fifteen and sixteen, who are unsure of what they want for their future. The service allows these young teenagers the chance to come into a small community centre to speak to qualified Career Advisors who can help guide them onto the right career path. As research has suggested, LAC struggle academically, and so the service is about promoting the importance of education, so the service can help the service user get their dream job. The service also provides these young people with valuable life skill as turning eighteen means coming out of their residential care and living as an independent adult. Money management is one aspect of the service, with workshops helping these young people learn how to budget as well as being careful with money. Simons (2014) believes that often young people do not know how to manage money until they find a job and this can result in poor money management, with teenagers often prioritising their wages on modern technology, for example the best and newest mobile phone on the market. This can be bad for life as a working adult as money gets spent on things they do not necessarily need, but think they do, with rent and food bills often taking second priority.

Despite this, Whitney (2008) goes onto explain how many LAC have no chance or will never complete their GCSE exams, due to circumstances beyond their control. Whitney (2008) believes disruptions to their education include being excluded from schools for long periods, exclusion can be because of low self-esteem as well as mental health problems. Therefore, this service would promote inclusion as practitioners would not judge an individual accessing the service and would provide the service user with the best possible advice to kick start their career. Furthermore, research by Cocker and Allain (2019) suggests that often LAC find it difficult to open up to strangers, specially those in high position jobs. Curtis et al (2004, as cite in Cocker and Allain, 2019, pp.) believes that LAC often find it intimidating to openly discuss certain topics. The service allows practitioners to deal with these difficult

circumstances in a sensitive but professional manner, allowing these young people to feel comfortable in opening up about difficult topics. This follows on from research by the Department for Education and skills (2006) found that many LAC struggle to settle in any environment due to often being singled out as 'different' and never having had much consistency in their lives. DFES (2006) believe that inclusion needs to be promoted this way is to meet new people and build new relationships. The service will do this as ultimately the aim is to find future employment for that young person or integrate them into school further. This way they can make new friends and finally feel acceptance as part of a friendship group.

In Article three of the UNCRC (2013) whereby a child's best interests are at the heart of any organisation/school. The service is person-centred and is highly focused on allowing student voice and choice. The service allows for effective decision-making and weighing up the different needs in terms of resources and the service (Cocker and Allain, 2019, pp.25). It is important that this Article is met as a LAC has often had a disadvantaged childhood compared with their peers. For example, UNCRC Article nine is for children not to be separated from their parents, although the vast majority of LAC have, with many having lived with different families, therefore not having their basic rights met. Furthermore, the seven core aims in Wales, one of the aims is for all children to have a flying start in life (Play Wales, 2019, p.1). Play Wales (2019) discuss how this involves children building up strong attachments with their parents and living in a secure and health environment which is healthy for their development. However, many of LAC have not had positive experiences of their early childhood, with many having been separated from their parents at an early age, and thus their development having been affected. Because of these negative experiences, the service wants to build up a good rapport with the service user and promote inclusion by ensuring their future is a bright one.

The service provided follows the PCP approach PATH which according to Sanderson (2015) will focus on what that individual wants their future to look like, and what job they want to have. Meetings will take place regular to discuss moving forward and how both parties can meet the desired goal. The support and quality advice of the practitioners allow the individual to stay on track. Parental support will allow the service provider to get to really know that individual and what they want their future to look like.

Child Law Advice (2019) discuss what help from local authorities is available to these LAC who are aged between sixteen and seventeen. Child Law Advice (2019) found these children can receive help into how they can get their own place to live as well as advice from Children's services. Despite this help from local authorities, many sixteen- and seventeen-year olds come out of their care placements early and do not necessarily know about the help they can receive and as a result suffer from social exclusion. This follows research by the Social Market Foundation (2018) who found that the number of LAC categorised as a NEET had increased to forty per cent. Showing their disadvantage continues into their later life. CAMHS LAC children can serve their foster care population from a single office making the service accessibility more difficult (Nuffield Foundation, 2011, pp.13). The National Adoption and fostering service (no date, as cited in Parliament, 2016, pp.8) found that often CAMHS will only treat a LAC until they are deemed as 'stable' and often many children are waiting up to two years to be seen for mental health problems.

Possible barriers to the service, is how popular the service could be. These young people may feel uncomfortable about opening up to a stranger about problems they may have. They may not have much faith in others because of their own experiences and so feel no trust in a stranger. As the service follows a PATH approach after a year, the service ends, however certain individuals may need guidance after a year, however this means the help will no longer be available to them. Moreover, many LAC may not want to receive the help the service provides, they may already have a job or know what they want to do post eighteen.

To conclude, LAC are severely disadvantaged within education but also within the job market. Funding results in services being severely stretched and so many LAC are not receiving the support they need. Due to having to leave care at such a young age, these young people have to quickly grow up and become independent, with a lot of pressure on their shoulders. Services such as CAMHS have long waiting lists with local government also having long lists for accommodation it means these LAC experience social exclusion. The service provided provides inclusion, choice, allowing a voice and promoting their rights. Moreover, more needs to be in education to ensure these young people receive their right to an education and get qualifications to allow their high percentage in the NEET category to drop.

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