

# At Kibble we aim to help our most vulnerable young people go on to have fulfilling adult lives

**Jim Gillespie**

## **Abstract**

This article outlines Kibble's early history as a reformatory school in Victorian times to the present context of Kibble Education and Care Centre's place in contemporary provision in children's services in Scotland. The article considers in particular Kibble's role in preparing young people for leaving care. Kibble's aim is to give young people as many opportunities as possible to enter the workplace and achieve fulfilling lives. However, our own evidence showed that many placements with mainstream employers were failing and that the gap between care and the world of work was in some cases too great. The article also describes Kibble's use of the social enterprise model to provide meaningful employment and training.

## **Keywords**

Residential care, leaving care, education, social enterprise

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## **Introduction**

For too long, young people leaving care have faced stigma and prejudice, particularly in the areas of education and employment. Despite the efforts of advocacy groups, government and care charities, educational attainment outcomes continue to be significantly poorer than for those who are non-care experienced. Much of this can be explained by historic factors and biased views in some parts of society, however, as practitioners we must play our part in empowering care experienced young people to have the same opportunities as their peers.

So, how do we achieve this? There is a need to support fairer access to further education and continued government backing for young workforce employability programmes. Making these policies a priority will help to ensure equality of opportunities for care experienced and non-care experienced young people alike. By placing young people at the forefront and giving them a voice, they can help shape services and drive future opportunities and change.

## **Tempus fugit**

The year 1859 saw some big things happen. Work had begun on the building of Big Ben in London, Darwin published his paper on the 'Origin of Species', and a little closer to home a reformatory school on the outskirts of Paisley in the west of Scotland was opened following the bequest of wealthy heiress, Miss Elizabeth Kibble.

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Kibble Reformatory School, or simply Kibble, began caring for young boys who could no longer be looked after by their families or had been placed there as an alternative to custody. The boys would be given care, education and training in trades such as tailoring, shoe making, agricultural and dairy work.

Revolutionary at the time, this approach would allow the boys (and it was just boys in those days, unlike now) the opportunity to go on to have independent and fulfilling adult lives. Victorian levels of poverty determined that, in many instances, being placed in Kibble meant food, shelter and the opportunity to gain skills. The double-edged sword of attending a reformatory school was of course the stigma associated with a young person being there in the first place. The boys who attended in those early days faced enormous barriers to employment because of this stigma.

Thankfully attitudes have slowly started to change due to the work of organisations like Who Cares? Scotland (<http://www.whocarescotland.org>) and others who actively advocate on behalf of care experienced young people.

Through their invaluable work they continue to break down barriers to employment and education. However, it is also true to say that parts of society continue to hold pre-conceived views about what being in care means and how the majority of young people become cared for.

A report from OFSTED in 2009 found that children in care in England were four times more likely to be targets of bullying at school. Nearly 10 years later, the Chair of the Independent Review of Scotland's Care System, Fiona Duncan, reminded us that the language and symbols that professionals use whilst interacting with young people in care can lead to bullying by their peer groups

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(Naysmith, 2018). We cannot be complacent and as practitioners we must play our part in making sure being in care does not mean children are targeted. At Kibble we have spent a lot of time working with young people to find terminology that removes negative connotations. This is why our secure care accommodation is referred to as our 'Safe Centre', and residential units as 'houses'. These small changes can make a huge impact to feelings of self-worth, giving young people a sense of belonging and a place where they feel safe and supported.

## **Young care leavers left behind?**

The provision of evidence-based care is light years away from where we first started in 1859. These improvements often come by asking challenging questions and not being afraid to implement organisational change. One such question we need to ask is: 'Are we preparing young people for leaving care?'

This question needs to be posed as unfortunately the statistics speak for themselves. Care leavers have lower levels of educational attainment, shorter life expectancy and are more likely than young people in general to receive a prison sentence. The Scottish Government recently produced a report considering the destinations of school leavers who are looked after and compared the figures to all school age leavers.

In 2016, 37% of school leavers in Scotland from mainstream schools progressed directly to university. For those who were in care, the figure was just 3%, though this was based on a survey with small numbers (Scottish Government, 2017: Table 2.2). This stark contrast can sometimes be hidden in the wider

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definition of 'positive destinations', i.e. training, employment or education.

However, even this figure has looked after children lagging behind all school leavers by a margin of 71% against 91% (Scottish Government, 2017:1).

Although more research is required to establish definite figures, it is commonly stated that care experienced young people are more likely to go to prison than to university. As practitioners, this is something we must work harder to change.

The number and level of qualifications looked after children achieve before leaving school also continues to cause concern. Forty per cent of looked after leavers receive at least one National 5 qualification (SCQF, n.d.) compared to 86% for all school leavers. When we consider Advanced Highers, just 1% of looked after leavers achieve this level of qualification, compared to 19% of all school leavers (Scottish Government, n.d.: Table 1.1).

There have been several attempts to reverse these numbers going back as far as the Kilbrandon Report of 1964, the Skinner Report (1992) and the Kent Report (1997). Despite much of this good work improving the odds for looked after young people, the disparities have remained stubbornly high. More recently, the Scottish Government announced a 'root and branch' review of care services, which is being driven and shaped by care experienced young people themselves. This is a positive step on our journey to ensuring our young care leavers can achieve their potential and be adequately prepared for life beyond care. One aspect that this review needs to consider is why so many young people in care leave education at a significantly younger age than those not in care.

The figures published by the Scottish Government show that in 2015/16, almost three quarters (73%) of looked after school leavers were aged 16 and under,

(i.e. they left school at the earliest point they could), compared to over one quarter (27%) of school leavers more generally. The proportion of leavers who were aged 16 and under has decreased since 2009/10, including among looked after leavers, but discrepancies between looked after leavers and other leavers remain consistent (Scottish Government, 2017: 4).

For young people to get the qualifications that will allow them to access further training or education, they must be encouraged and incentivised to stay in formal education for as long as possible. There may be several reasons why looked after young people choose to leave school as early as possible, not least their experiences of bullying and stigma described earlier in this article.

The link between staying on at school, the bullying of pupils in care and poorer educational outcomes will not come as a surprise to educators and academics. Nevertheless, we should increase efforts to make schooling a safe and encouraging environment for all young people.

As care professionals, we must return to the point regarding the semantics of the environment that a young person enters into every day. By getting small things right and by creating a safe setting where young people feel valued, we have a better chance of sustaining a young person's interest in education. The result will be that a young person is more likely to achieve qualifications and have better employment and education prospects.

Of course, there continue to be barriers to further and, in particular, higher education for those from a cared-for background. Dame Ruth Silver's Widening Access Commission acknowledged this with her final report giving clear recommendations that would help level the playing field. The Scottish

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Government has accepted this and replaced student living cost loans with a non-repayable bursary, as well as providing a more flexible package of student support for learners with a care experience from academic year 2017/18 (Silver, 2016: Recommendation 22).

What is even more encouraging is the adoption of minimum thresholds for entry. From 2017, those with a care experience, who meet the access threshold are entitled to the offer of a place at a Scottish university, though more work needs to be done to implement this commitment. Entitlement also applies to those with a care experience who have had to take a break from higher education and wish to return (Silver, 2016: Recommendation 21). These are practical steps that will make a big difference to both the annual statistics, and more importantly the lives of some of the most vulnerable young people in Scotland.

## **More than one pathway**

At Kibble Group we are proud of the attainment of all our pupils, not just the ones choosing to continue their education at college and university. Ever since our foundation in 1859, work-based learning has played an important role in preparing a young person for life beyond care.

The objective has always been to give young people as many opportunities as possible to enter the workplace and have a fulfilling career in employment. However, our own evidence showed that many placements with mainstream employers were failing and that the gap between care and the world of work was in some cases too great.

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In 2005 we established a collective of social enterprises called KibbleWorks that would provide training and employment in a supported setting (Kibble, 2018).

Employability programmes help many young people both in care and those leaving care avoid the cliff edge that they face when transitioning from full-time education into mainstream employment. This approach is now used widely across Scotland. In 2014, the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce led by Sir Iain Wood recommended that supported employment schemes be made available to those furthest from the jobs market (Education Scotland, n.d.). The Kibble Group stepped up to the challenge and created a new Young Workforce Development Centre based in Hillington, Glasgow.

Named 'The Experience', the entertainment venue houses an indoor electric go-karting arena, laser tag, restaurant, and conference centre. Young people are given the chance to gain valuable real-life work experience and achieve qualifications in the leisure and hospitality industry. We work closely with partner agencies to reach those furthest from the jobs market and have a track record to be proud of. This approach by the Kibble Group has been found to significantly improve outcomes for young people where mainstream employment schemes have failed.

Since July 2014, over 150 young people have gained skills and experience that have allowed them to enter mainstream employment. Of course, many of the young people we see continue to face barriers to employment. However, by creating supported employment schemes, we can help achieve the Scottish Government's target to reduce youth unemployment by 40% by 2021.



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The value of having a job goes far beyond receiving a pay cheque every month. Whether it is for self-esteem, providing for your family, or feeling like a valued member of society, being able to work helps to give us a feeling of self-worth. Even more importantly, by creating opportunities where there were previously none, we can help our most vulnerable young people go on to have fulfilling adult lives.

## **Cliff edge of leaving care**

Government initiatives such as supported jobs and widening access to university have the potential to transform the lives of looked after young people. We must continue to support these policies whilst at the same time using evidence to look at new ways to level the playing field.

Beyond grandiose headline grabbing schemes, professionals must also ensure that their interactions with young people do not make them a target. It may sound oxymoronic to argue that on one hand we need specialist schemes to support care leavers whilst at the same time stating that we cannot use terminology that distinguishes the same people, but ask any teenager what they want and that is to fit in with everyone else. Getting the small things such as language right can be a big deal to the young people we are here to care for.

The statistics do not lie and there is a long way to go, but progress is being made to making opportunities equal for both care experienced and non-care experienced young people.

## About the author

Jim Gillespie joined Kibble in 2014 as an Executive Director. In September 2016, after two years of service, he was appointed Chief Executive Designate, before taking over as Chief Executive in May 2017.

Jim brings wide experience at senior management and director level of residential care across secure, residential school with education and community settings, including fostering and supported care. In addition, he has extensive experience of providing consultancy on policy development and implementation to governments in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In 2006, Jim was awarded a Butler Trust Award by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne and has recently completed his Masters in Business Administration (MBA).

Kibble has undergone significant growth in the past decade, and Jim will lead the organisation in the years to come as it considers its strengths in existing markets and looks at ways to potentially develop new services and enter into new markets. Jim firmly believes that staying strong to Kibble's mission and values will be a key feature in the organisation's development, outcomes and sustainability for the generations ahead.

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