

Surveying public attitudes to care experienced young people

Transcript

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I'm Heather Coady, and I'm the Programme Director at the Life Changes Trust for the care experience young people's programme. Life Changes Trust commissioned this piece of work because we were really keen to hear what public attitudes were, what the levels of stigma might be within the general populace. The outcomes of the survey were really fascinating actually, and what we found was that the majority of people in Scotland feel that being in care makes no difference to whether a young person is likely to get into trouble with the police. And that was around about 64%. The majority felt that it made no difference to whether a young person with maybe a good parent or not, and again, that was significant, it was around about 83%. And a majority also felt that being in care makes no difference to whether children behave badly. They saw them as the same as everybody else, they didn't have a problem about them, playing with their children or marrying a relative or being friends with them. And I think that was a really interesting and good finding. At least encouraging thing about the survey was that while there was a minority of people who had poor views around young people, in terms of them being troublesome, or more likely to be in trouble with the police, or whatever that might look like, it was quite a significant minority all the same.

We decided to do the study now for two reasons. One, there is a significant review going on at the moment of the care system in Scotland. So that's really important, and the growing movement of young people who are actually finding their voice, and speaking out about their experiences. So that's having an impact. So we were keen to capture what are attitudes now? The other reason we wanted to this piece is that we are doing a big piece around reframing attitudes. And we wanted to get a sense of what are they now before we move into that arena of really trying to shape and change how people feel about care experienced young people. The reframing care project has been a really interesting one and very timely, what we wanted to do was to work with people in the care sector, and really get a picture of what do we mean by care? What does it look like? And then test public attitudes in relation to that, and really find out from the public, what's your idea of why people are in care? What takes them there? What does that mean about them? And

from then figure out really good messages that will start to shift some of the poor perceptions and poor ideas that people are holding. The reason that we see some negative attitudes, I think primarily, it's because what we see in the media consistently is negative. Because there's stigma, people quite often feel to ashamed to say, actually, I grew up in care, or I had an experience of the care system. And that means that we often don't have good role models, we don't have people that say, Yes, it was bad for a time, I got good support, I was helped to make sense of my life. And I was helped to recover and to flourish, and to be like everybody else. I think attitudes towards care experienced young people are shifting really significantly in Scotland right now. And that's for a number of reasons, there's been a lot of attention paid to listening properly to what young people themselves are saying. And that's not just in this area, I think that's across the board. We also have a significant Independent Care Review going on that was commissioned by the First Minister. And a lot of people are very interested in getting right behind that and significantly changing things for the better. In all of that, the voice of young people is just getting louder and more confident. Their expertise is being listened to. Attitudes are shifting towards them and people are able to see the contribution that they're able to make, and how passionate and driven they are about changing things for the better, not just for themselves, but for all young people coming through the care system. Hearing stories from people who have an experience of care is absolutely crucial. As human beings we relate to stories, it makes it real, we can understand that as human beings, we all need the same things we all need to be loved. We all need to be taken care of. We all need a sense of connection to flourish. When we hear those stories, and the good and the bad, we're able to get a good understanding of what's worked, what hasn't worked. The danger of that is if we overly focus on stories, we can sometimes forget the reasons for people's experiences which will include poverty and unemployment, and inequalities. So it's important to understand both - that it is an illustration of some of the deeper ills that we don't live in Western society.

So the next step in terms of what we found from the findings and how this has influenced our work, is to build on that. It is to really build and help people to understand that with the right support, with the right conditions, young people who have experience of care can achieve and flourish the same as everybody else. Until we have people understanding what's needed, and the extent to which it's needed. We're not going to see the kinds of shifts and changes that we're looking for. Key to this is putting young people who have lived that at the heart of everything, and that's what we do as a trust. The Life Changes Trust is all about funding in a way that consistently does this and asks people to do this. And the really exciting thing about that is when you do that, something quite magic happens. And we start to see this powerful emerging voice that can lead, that can direct, that can share the experience that they have, and can make things much, much better than they've been.