

Poverty of ambition

Transcript

Chris Wright, Team Manager, throughcare and aftercare.

The Care leavers covenant is a very aspirational, and very positive piece of work. And I think that there's nothing within the covenant that we shouldn't aspire to. The challenge for us in delivering that is massive. I worry that our focus is on improving outcomes for those who it's easier to improve outcomes for, and not on the most challenging and difficult young people. And I think the issues for them are very long standing, which requires change, not just in how we view care leavers, but how we view looked after children.

In relation to corporate parenting, the 2014 Act introduced a whole range of new corporate parents, but there are still a kind of misconception that the only corporate parents are social workers or local authorities, and I think that that's part of the issue, in relation to both the covenant and corporate parenting. I'm from social work and work within a local authority setting, and our corporate parenting plan, it could be argued is more of a social work corporate parenting plan than a wider, all council departments have responsibilities.

The legislation and the guidance and the covenant talk about entitlement, but we don't talk about entitlement to what? The legislation has been quite cleverly written, in that they're entitled to an assessment of their needs, they're not entitled to any money. Entitlement is open to interpretation. And there's a postcode lottery of how services are delivered. Because there are no national standards that we operate to. There is no clear and concise and common understanding of what entitlement to services means. That's the issue at stake, there isn't an understanding that every young person should get this. We use austerity to excuse some of our failings, and I work in a local authority, and I'm not accusing other people of that, I am saying there's an austerity of ambition of what we should be doing for this small group of very disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people. That's about our ambition for them. It's about our ability to, to engage them, to fill the gaps that are there because they've been abused or neglected, or whatever the reason that they've been accommodated. There's a poverty of ambition across every part of the system for these young people. We hide behind financial austerity, you know, the legislation that put in place that local authorities took over responsibility for financial payments for care leavers under 18, back in 2003, and the legislation talks about that we must give young people the equivalent - at least the equivalent to benefits. So this is in 2003, before austerity, and all local authorities pay is the rate that benefits are paid at. So we have had the opportunity back then, to pay more, but we've paid the minimum.

If constantly we are striving to just do the minimum, we will get the minimum return. So it's not all about money, but it's about how we spend that money and how we value young people who are in the care system.

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