
4 Information for Young People in Residential Care: The Views of the Young People

To obtain an impression of the information needs of young people in residential care we conducted a series of interviews with a total of 35 young people whose ages ranged from 3.5 to 16 years. Ten young people were interviewed individually, the remaining 25 were dealt with in five groups. In two cases it was possible to hold group discussions as the groups consisted of at least seven young people whose ages ranged from 11 to 15 years. The other three groups were smaller, and the participants were younger. One group consisted of four young people from a single family whose ages ranged from 3.5 to 13 years, another included two brothers aged eight and nine, along with a girl of 10. The third group consisted of a girl of nine and a boy of 11. In these cases we kept closely to the interview schedule.

The young people were interviewed in a variety of homes run by local authorities and a voluntary organisation. Residents at two assessment centres were also interviewed. In this chapter and the next, the terms 'residential home' and 'residential care' will be used loosely, to cover assessment centres and secure units as well.

The young people had been staying in the homes for periods ranging from four days to four years. The average length of stay was over nine months. Most of the young people had lived in more than one residential home. In one case an interviewee in a secure unit had been in seven other homes and was in the secure unit for the second time. She was expecting her 17th birthday and with it a transfer to prison. Three had lived previously with foster parents.

The information given to young people

The process of being admitted to a residential home must be traumatic for most young people. Many are admitted as emergencies and even when there is time for the admission to be planned and prepared, the actual process of going to live somewhere strange must be a bewildering and potentially frightening experience. In such circumstances the giving of information can play an important role. Some young people appeared to resent the fact that they were not given enough information and as a consequence, they were required to learn the rules through experience, thus making the early days and weeks in the home less certain (although this would be inevitable to some extent). For others, receiving information about what life was going to be like in the home had been an obvious comfort and source of reassurance.

We tried to explore the extent to which young people had been made aware of alternatives to residential care. It is, after all, only by knowing about different options that it becomes possible to exercise choice. Only a small minority felt that they had been told about the alternatives. In most cases this seems to have been limited to a discussion of the differences between homes. In one case a social worker discussed the options open to the court - Borstal, remand home or foster parents - but the young person noted that 'I didn't get a choice'

This awareness that they are unable to choose was very apparent. One young person, when asked if anyone had discussed alternatives to residential care, said quite firmly 'there were no alternatives'.

Even though young people do not have much power to make or to influence decisions about whether or not to move into residential care they do have very significant information needs when making the transition. They may not be in a position to exercise any significant degree of choice, but they need information to make the process less bewildering.

Prior information

Most of the young people did not receive much information before they arrived at the home. For many, the nature of their admission effectively prevented this. Some of those who were admitted as emergencies knew the night before that they were coming. Others had even less notice:

I knew the night before because I had to spend the night in the police station.

I was just brought here from another short-term place. I didn't know I was coming.

For a significant number of young people the decision to admit them is made by a court. In such cases their admission to a home may have been expected but nonetheless there is relatively little time between the decision being announced and the actual admission.

What happened, right, I was in court, right, I just come out of the female cell and my social worker said to me that the place I was living didn't want me any more and there was nowhere else for me to go except outside London.

Relatively little attempt seems to have been made to anticipate the decisions of the court and to prepare the child for the different possibilities:

No-one talked to me because no-one knew what was happening. It all depended on what the court decided.

In one case, however, the young person's social worker had made an attempt to explain and discuss the alternatives:

I came here straight from the court. We didn't know beforehand what the court would decide. My social worker talked about the possibilities, the different options the court had. We were sitting in one of those little cells. She said it could be Borstal, or remand home, or foster parents. But I didn't get any choice.

In other cases young people had more warning of the move. Two girls in a secure unit had known two weeks in advance that they were to be transferred, even though in one case there appears to have been a degree of urgency about the admission:

I knew I was coming here about two weeks before I arrived. I was living in a children's home in _____. I smashed up every window in the place and they decided to send me here. I'd smash these windows too if they were glass.

In marked contrast, some of the non-emergency admissions seem to have been planned well in advance and the young people prepared accordingly. Some were able to visit their new home, while in other cases staff from the new home visited the young people and prepared them for the move. In one case a young person could not read well and his social worker had taken the time to draw some pictures of the home with him. This had made a major impact on the boy and on his sister.

For some of the young people, staff of the home had made a considerable effort. One boy of 11 had a visit from a member of staff and when he arrived found that they had made a welcome cake for him. His sister, who had arrived a year before, noted with some chagrin that she had received neither a visit nor a cake. Another girl had been sent a picture of the home and a letter by the children. In all these cases the event had happened at least eight months before the interview but the young people remembered very clearly.

We do not have enough information to draw firm conclusions, but it does seem that the young people who have received plenty of notice and who had been prepared for the move through visits and other events tended to have more positive attitudes towards their home.

To try to assess the young people's prior awareness of the home we asked them if their life in the home had turned out to be as they expected. About half said that it was not as they had expected. The remainder were divided equally between those who hadn't known what to expect and those whose experience matched their expectation.

It is worth noting that all of the young people expected life in the home to be worse than it was. In all cases the reality had turned out to be better:

No, it's different from what we expected. The old children's home was grotty and we thought this would be horrible too but this one is much more luxurious.

I thought it would have really strict rules but there wasn't. It was strange at first but after two hours you knew the staff and then the children.

Two of the young people had picked up their impressions from their friends and had developed quite frightening expectations. One thought it would be 'a cell - a padded room' while the other said:

All the stories you hear about Borstals are wrong - they make it seem a lot harder - tighter - than it actually is. It was the generally accepted view that this place would be like a prison and very rough. I was a bit scared because I thought it would be very tough - afraid of the other boys and about the lack of freedom. I would have worried less if I had known what it was really like.

Another had formed her views and expectations of remand centres from seeing a film:

It's better than I expected - more secure units are rougher than this, and they're dirty.
And remand centres! - we saw films about those.

Size seems to be important for the younger children. Four of those aged under 11 said that they had expected the homes to be smaller and were surprised that they were so big.

Once the young people were admitted the information flowed much more freely. All the young people said that they had been told what life would be like in the home once they were admitted. The only exceptions were four girls who were in a secure unit and one 16 year old boy who had lived in another home.

Much of the information the young people were given was concerned with rules and procedures. The young people also said they were told about activities in the home and about their room. Only one young person said that they were told about why they were in the home.

In some cases the young people had received printed information setting out the rules and procedures for the home. The rules and procedures were also covered in some of the introductory talks. This did not seem to be the case for all the young people, and in one group discussion the young people felt that they had to pick up the rules as they went along:

- You live here for about a week then you know.
- When you come here, they don't put down all the rules.
- There's lots of things you get into trouble for that you don't even know about.
- And you think you are going to be assessed.
- Well, I can understand why they don't tell you all the things when you come because it would take two or three hours.
- No, they can't be bothered telling you.
- You get a book but it's got none of the rules in it.
- [Question] How do you find out about the rules generally?
- When you've been here a bit you know them.
- No, it's all in the book.

This, perhaps, reflects the fact that information may be made available, but the young people will not necessarily retain it, or even remember where to look for it later. In part, the problem arises simply because there is so much information that needs to be given. As one child commented:

They told us enough - hundreds of things - we couldn't remember it all.

In one case an attempt had been made to focus the young person's attention on the information by presenting it in the form of a contract which he had to sign:

The 16-plus group leader told us about the home when we came and gave us a little contract to sign about not doing anything illegal, or fighting, or taking drugs or assaulting staff. There was a general talk about what they'd do and about activities and which group you would be in.

In another case the information was made available in a rather more permanent form:

It's all on the fridge - the bedtimes and what we have to do each night.

At this stage the staff play a very important role in transmitting information and in so doing, reassuring the young people and helping them to settle in:

At first I wanted to go home. And then I sat down with ____ [the head of the home] and she explained things, like why I was here.

They told me how nice it would be. ____ [a keyworker] told me about pocket money and bedtimes. ____ [the deputy head of the home] told me about the rules.

Information about life after the home

There is a stage where young people do, arguably, have a greater degree of choice over their lives. This occurs when they leave the home as young adults and begin to lead an independent life. When this time arrives a young person will be faced with the need to make a number of choices with significant consequences. To do this in anything other than a random way they will need to have access to a significant range of information. To explore information needs and provision at this stage we asked eight older young people who were due to leave the home within the next six months whether anyone had given them any information or had talked to them about what life was going to be like outside. Only one said that they had received any information, the other seven said that no-one had talked to them about the subject. On closer questioning, however, we found that the picture was rather more complex.

The respondent who replied positively was 16 years old and had talked to her social worker, her mother, sister and to the staff in the home. When asked what they had told her she replied simply:

That I have to behave myself better.

Of the others, one stated that:

The staff speak to me but I don't listen to them because I am still in a bad mood.

Another admitted that the staff had in fact talked to him about the possibilities of college, a Youth Training Scheme place and jobs. But when asked if they had discussed money with him, he said that he thought not. Another said that:

I don't think that anyone can talk to me because no-one knows what is going to happen. For some funny reason after court last week I was remanded for another 10 weeks.

This, perhaps, highlights two points about information-giving. The first is that, no matter what effort goes into transmitting information, a great deal depends on the receptivity of the person to whom the information is aimed. The second is that the timing of information-giving is very important and that in many cases this will mean that it will be necessary to tailor the information and its timing to the particular needs of the individual. There will be very little to be gained from placing a boy who has just been remanded for 10 weeks in a group to discuss the pros and cons of college and YTS.

Information about rights

So far, most of the discussion has focussed on information about rules and procedures and information which will help the young people to exercise some degree of control over their lives inside and outside the home. In the interviews with staff in the homes it was possible to identify a third type of information - information about the young people's rights.

It is perhaps worth noting that information about the young people's rights was not referred to spontaneously in response to any of the general questions. When asked what information they were given when they arrived at the home, for example, none of the young people referred to information about their rights. To explore the issue a little further we asked them whether there was any way in which young people living in the home could make complaints about things they are not happy with. A large majority said that they were aware of the complaints procedure. Some of the younger children thought there was no such procedure and others were unsure.

In some cases the young people's knowledge of the system seemed fairly rudimentary, and in others they appeared only to be aware of the informal processes for dealing with dissatisfaction. One young person seemed to be well aware of the routes which were open to them:

It depends on the complaint. You've got Critical Incident forms if you've been restrained. Then there's daily meetings, mornings and evenings. You can make requests in the mornings and evening meetings review the day.

We asked the young people how they had come to learn about the procedures. Three said that the staff had told them, two said they knew about it already, while one said that he had learned it from the other boys. In three cases, however, it seemed that the young people had worked out the procedure for themselves when confronted by the need to make a complaint. In one case the need arose through an 'incident' which led eight of the residents to make a complaint about a member of staff. None of the young people seemed aware of any printed information on complaints procedures.

Young people should be aware of their rights, like the right to a complaints procedure, and they should have access to sufficient information about the procedure to enable them to exercise their rights when and if it is appropriate for them to do so. Oral communication may well be the best means of alerting someone to the existence of his or her rights, but it will almost certainly need to be reinforced by some form of printed information which can be referred to as and when it is required.

The young people's information needs

As well as assessing the information which was presented to the young people, we wanted to discover what information the young people felt that they needed. It is not easy to do this. The relatively elusive nature of information means that it is difficult for people to specify their needs with any degree of precision or even to state that they lack information on particular topics. Accordingly, we approached the issue with three different questions. We asked the young people if they thought that they had been given enough information about life in the home when they were admitted, and

for those who thought they had not, we asked them what extra information they would have liked. We asked them if there was anything that they would still like to know now that they had settled into the home. Finally, we asked them to imagine that a friend of theirs was coming to live in the home and to identify the information that the friend should be given.

More than half the young people felt that they had not been given enough information when they entered the home. On the other hand one felt that she had been given so much that she had been unable to remember it all and consequently she still felt a lack of information about certain things.

Most of the young people wanted more information about the rules and procedures in the home. They felt that they had not received enough about specific rules and the ways they were applied and they wanted to know more about activities and things like arrangements for visits. One young person expressed the view that he had been given enough broad information to enable him to pick up the detail through his daily experience in the home. No-one mentioned a lack of information about the rights of the residents, although, as we have seen, their knowledge of rights was rather less than complete.

Although many of the young people felt that they had picked up the information they required since they had arrived at the home, about a third felt that there were still things they would like to know. In some cases they were concerned about a specific issue or query:

You know when you come back late, say by 10.30 when you are due back at 10 o'clock, you lose ten points. You know when you run away, how many points do you lose?

In others they were seeking explanations of things which seemed arbitrary to them:

The reasons for the removal of privileges - snap things that happen. Suddenly you are not allowed to smoke but you don't know why not.

In one case a young person said that they would like to know more about the history of the building and how long the staff had been there.

These information needs cannot be described as being of very great significance. They are the sort of needs which will always arise through the participation of individuals in the life of an organisation. The need exists because of the circumstances of the individual, not because someone has omitted to provide the information in advance.

We obtained a very full response to our question about the information which friends should be given if they came to the home. The young people were able to be quite specific. Most prominent was information about the rules and procedures of the home. This included things like the arrangements for visits; access to telephones; whether or not they could smoke; what pocket money they would get; bedtimes and clothing grants.

Next in significance came information about the less tangible side of what life in the home was like. Four young people felt that it was important to convey to the friend information about what the staff were like. Whether or not the friends would get

rooms of their own was seen as very important, as was giving a clear idea of what they will do during the day. They felt that the friend would need to know about the arrangements for school and what the social side was like. The young people also felt that the friends should be told why they were coming to the home and what they should do to fit in.

There was a concern to dispel the myths surrounding life in residential homes and to make it clear that it was not the end of the world:

Basically they should be told what to expect. Instead of all the myths they should be told about the reality.

You don't get a lot of love when you are in care but it's a good life. You make a lot of friends.

The fact that the home could offer protection could also be important. One young person from a family group said that her friend should be told:

That they're going to be really safe. That they're going to see their Mum every three weeks. That they can go home for a weekend and that they will make a lot of friends.

Another said:

Tell them not to be scared of going and talking to people. That if you are not sure of anything you could go to you friend or to a staff member.

One 11 year old boy said that he would tell his friend that 'the garden is big'.

So, it would seem that the young people themselves felt that information was needed about how the home worked and how to fit into the routines and procedures, living within the rules. They also felt that the positive side of residential care should be emphasised, in some cases stressing the security that the home provided.

Sources of information

People were the most important source of information. Young people relied on oral communications from a wide range of people. Against this, information in printed or other forms was relatively insignificant.

The overall picture suggests that social workers are important sources of information for young people in care. Before moving into the home, the social worker provides much of the information on which the young person's view is founded. The social worker continues to be used by many young people as a source of information during their stay. The most significant information source, however, is the staff working in the homes. They are the formal source of most of the information about rules and procedures but they can also play an important, if less formal, part in giving information which enables the young person to develop control over their lives. In this, the personalities of the young person and the member of staff are particularly important.

Teachers, parents, friends and other residents are all used to a limited degree as sources of information but each of these sources is perceived to have its limitations.

Social workers

Social workers were the most significant source of information for young people before they came to the home:

The social worker was the only person who told us anything. She said it would be just right for the four of us and she told us it would be out in the country.

Social workers accompanied some young people on visits to the home before they were formally admitted. In a number of cases, they were also present in court and were able to explain the likely courses of action.

In one case a young person said that she had telephoned her social worker to ask what the home would be like. Indeed, a number of young people felt that social workers were the best source of information about life in a residential home and were particularly useful when a young person was facing a move from one home to another.

Young people continued to regard the social worker as an important source of information during their stay in the home and a significant number said that they would telephone their social worker if there was anything they wanted to know while they were residents.

Finally, social workers were perceived to be a significant information source at the time when young people are planning to leave the home to live outside. They were the most frequently mentioned source of information at this stage in a young person's residential career.

Staff in the home

While young people have a relationship with their social workers that pre-dates and post-dates their stay in the home, it is the staff of the home who act as the most important source of information during their stay. In some cases staff from the home make contact with young people before they first visit the home and re-establish contact when the young people make preliminary visits.

It is when the young people are admitted, however, that the information-giving role assumes its full significance. There is obviously a great deal of information to be conveyed in a relatively short space of time. Information about rules and procedures predominates and here it seems that the primary information-giving role is played by the head of home or the deputy head. Keyworkers or group leaders seem to have a wider brief, adding information about ways of fitting into the home. It also seems that staff are called upon to provide information to reassure the young people and to explain things like why they are there and what will happen to them. The young people also identified the staff of the home as the most appropriate people to talk to other young people about going into a home.

Once the young people have been in the home for a while some of them build up relationships with different members of staff and seem to use them more selectively as sources of information. One child, for example said:

I like talking to ____ [a residential social worker] because I understand him and he understands me.

In contrast, another said:

I hate my keyworker. He says that he understands but he doesn't.

Generally, though, the young people spoke very positively about the helpfulness of the staff in the homes.

Teachers

Few young people saw teachers as a potential source of information. One girl had talked to her teacher about the prospect of a move to a residential home:

'She said that it depended on your situation, but sometimes you could stay in your area and get back with your parents.

She commented later in the interview that the information the teacher had given was really helpful. Perhaps surprisingly, that was the only direct reference to teachers as sources of information.

Parents

Young people did not seem to feel that parents were good sources of information either. Before moving into the home, one young person had asked her parents what the life would be like there, but had simply been told to wait and find out. Another girl had discussed the alternatives to residential care with her mother. One 13 year old boy who had been in the home for two weeks, having previously lived with foster parents, thought that his Mum had been the best person to talk to about going into care.

Parents were mentioned more frequently as sources of information once the young people had become established in the home. A number said that they would telephone their parents to find out information and one said that he was trying to maintain contact with his former school through his parents. On the other hand, only one of the eight young people who were about to leave the home as young adults had discussed the options open to them with their parents.

Friends

It was clear from what they said that young people in residential care also picked up a great deal of information from their friends both inside and outside the home. Before going to live in the home, several young people said that they had discussed the prospect with their friends. It seems likely that this contributed to the rather negative view that the young people had developed. One boy who had formed his views through discussions with other boys at school said:

It was the generally accepted view that it would be like a prison, and rough.

Once the young people had arrived at the home they came into contact with the other residents and, not surprisingly, obtained a lot of information from them. In one case the young person was shown around the home by other young people as part of her induction process.

But when we asked young people directly who they thought were the best people to talk to young people about going into a residential home, rather surprisingly only two out of the 35 suggested other young people in care. One said:

They should talk to the young people in care because they know best - they know what it is like.

In contrast, one of the boys felt that the other residents were *not* good sources of information. In response to a question about who was particularly helpful in giving information he said:

Not the other kids because no-one is interested in helping other kids very much. You can't really sit and talk to them. They're just not interested in each other's problems.

It is likely, however, that much will depend on the personalities involved and on the nature of the home. One 13 year old girl, for example, said:

Some of the younger children talk to me because they are afraid to tell the staff and then I talk to ____ [the head of the home].

One interviewee made a point about the problems of communicating with adults as compared with other young people:

Adults all say the same thing. They don't talk to you like they do other adults. They don't use all the words I'd use if I were on the street. Other kids who use the same language as me - they're the best people. Lot's of people probably don't understand me.

Very few other people were mentioned as information sources. The police, perhaps for obvious reasons, are not regarded as good sources of information. In at least one case they seem to have contributed directly to the creation of a very negative image of the home in the mind of a 16-year old boy.

While oral communication plays a very important part in the information process, it is not the only way in which young people acquire information about residential care. Visits and printed information also have a part to play.

Other sources of information: visits and printed information

The opportunity for young people to gather their own information through a visit to a home was seen by them as being very important. In many cases, the circumstances of the admission effectively prevented a prior visit, but where it was possible, the visit made a significant impact on the young person.

Printed information seems also to have made an impact on the occasions when it was made available. Only two of the young people said that they had received any printed information before coming to the home. One said:

My social worker gave me a book called 'Being in a Home' and 'Going to a Home' and she talked to me about it. The books were really useful. They explained on the spot what it would be like.

Some homes seem to have given the young people leaflets or booklets when they arrived. These set out the rules and procedures for the home, although one

interviewee said that the book did not contain enough information about the rules. Printed information was mentioned relatively infrequently during the interviews but when it was referred to the young people seemed to be very positive about it. We asked them, for example, to describe what they thought would have been the best way to find out about being in a home. One young person responded:

They should get a pamphlet. Social workers in the other home could give it to them when they knew they were going. They'd really like to find out about it. With photographs. Visits would be a good idea too - especially for the ones who can't read.

In contrast another young person said:

Booklets don't tell the truth. They make out it's a bed of roses here.

We asked the older interviewees who were due to leave the homes if they had received any printed information about matters that would concern them once they were living independently - information about jobs, benefits, education, training schemes, housing, and so on. We were surprised to find that none of them had received any such information.

We went on to ask them what they thought were the best ways of giving information on these subjects. One boy referred to leaflets, saying:

Leaflets would be good if they were done properly and really told you what you wanted to know - most leaflets don't tell you what you want to know.

Oral communication is a good means of transmitting information, but when matters become complex and it is necessary to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a range of different options, then it becomes more necessary to have information available in a more permanent form so that it can be consulted and referred to. The lack of printed information at these crucial stages in a young person's life in residential care must be seen as a serious deficiency.

Information seeking

So far we have concentrated on the information which is presented to young people in care. We should not, however, overlook the fact that the young people should accept some responsibility for seeking information for themselves. We asked a number of questions to explore the extent to which the young people did, in fact, actively seek information. The picture which emerged was not encouraging. We first asked the question in the context of finding out in advance what living in the home would be like. Only three of the 35 interviewees said that they had made an attempt to find out. Those who had, tried to get an overall view of what they could expect:

I wanted to know what it was like - everything. I wanted to know what to expect.

To get this information, two talked to their social workers and one also discussed the subject with her parents. The third respondent talked to his teacher.

This relatively low level of activity before going into the home might be explained by the fact that many young people are admitted as emergencies and thus, presumably, have little prior warning. In other cases the young people may feel fatalistically that

the system has taken them over and that as they have no choice there is little point in trying to find out anything. A further possibility is that the young people we interviewed simply did not recognise or understand the importance of information.

The position was rather different when we asked them what they did about finding out information when they were in the home. Mostly the young people ask a member of the staff. For some this seems to be a fairly random process:

I grab a member of staff.

I talk to whoever is closest to me when a thought comes into my head.

Others approach members of staff more selectively. Young people also contact social workers, parents and friends by telephone to ask for information. One indicated that there was more to gathering information than simply asking people questions:

You find out things from conversations. You hear little rumours - see memos - and you follow up the clues.

Finally we asked the young people who were about to leave the home if they had tried to gather any information. One said that he had been trying to keep in touch with his school through his parents. Another said:

It's mostly books and talking to people - there's a book called *Not the End of the Road*.

On the whole, though, the young people do not seem to have developed much instinct for seeking out information during their time in the home.

Key issues

The differences between homes and between young people

It was noticeable that there were significant differences between the circumstances in homes where young people had been sent to be contained and those where young people had been sent for their own protection. The former are more likely to have a high proportion of emergency admissions and the young people are less likely to assimilate information presented to them.

Some young people do not listen, others do not remember

One interviewee actually said:

I can't remember. The staff here - when they talk to me I don't really listen.

It is probable that other young people will also fail to listen or, because of other pre-occupations, will fail to hear what is being said to them. Most will not remember what they are told. Oral communication is a good means of transmitting information, but once transmitted, the information is not always retained. Most of us forget a very large proportion of what we are told and frequently what we remember is not the most important information. Mostly when confronted with the need for information we ask whoever gave it to us to repeat what they said. This can be time-consuming

and, for the information source concerned, a little irritating. More important, we may only realise that we have forgotten the vital information when it is too late.

One way to overcome this is to reinforce oral communication with information in a more permanent - usually printed - form. This provides the recipient with a convenient source of information which can be retained and referred to as necessary.

The importance of prior information

The information the young people receive before they start living in the home seems to be particularly important. For many the prior impression they develop is unfavourable and this initial view of the home is gradually replaced with a revised impression as new information is received and processed. The prior impression, however, stays with them as a strong memory, perhaps to be passed on in turn to others.

For other young people, the care taken over the preparation for life in a residential home, through visits and the exchange of information prior to admission, seems to have made a major impact and to have eased the transition into the home. The impression which was created was an enduring one and it generated a feeling that the home was a welcoming, rather than a frightening, place.

Myths and legends

Closely related to the point about prior information is the fact that there appear to be many myths around concerning residential homes. These undoubtedly contribute to the unfavourable views which many of the young people form before coming to the home. They seem to be spread by the young people's peer group and may well need to be countered actively in any official information prepared about residential care.

The lack of choice and power

Young people are relatively powerless when it comes to residential care. They have little choice about whether or not to go into a home, nor do they have much choice about which home it is to be. It is not surprising, therefore, that they feel powerless in the face of the system which is dealing with them. This feeling of powerlessness is a probable cause of the fact that they make little attempt to gather information about residential care before coming to live in the home. It could also explain some of the attitudes towards information once they have been admitted.

It is possible that a similar feeling of helplessness is experienced when they are confronted with the different options open to them when they leave the home to live independently in the community.

Personalities

The effectiveness of oral communication depends to a great extent on the matching of the personalities of the communicator and the recipient. Any conflict of personalities is likely to impair the flow of information. This is particularly significant in the context of residential homes for young people as so much of the information flow is based on oral communication. Further there are the inevitable difficulties of communication between adults and young people.