



scottish universities insight institute

mobilising knowledge for a better Scotland

Getting it Right for Looked after Disabled Children and Young People

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1. Overview

a. Aims and objectives

Our overarching aim was to explore and understand the experiences of looked after disabled children and young people in research, policy and practice arenas, in order to inform and encourage change. In Scotland, around 16,000 children are 'looked after' by local authorities as defined by Section 17 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. A significant proportion of these children are disabled (estimated to be 11% compared with 7% for all children), yet looked after disabled children constitute a hidden group in research, policy and practice. Data collection about disability is poor compared to other aspects of the lives of looked after children. Worryingly, the disability status of 12% of looked after children in Scotland is not known. Substantial knowledge and expertise exists in both the disability field and the looked after children field, but mutual exchange and collaboration remain limited. In our discussions with international academics and policy makers, it emerged that this gap of knowledge and oversight is mirrored internationally.

The key objectives of this knowledge exchange programme were:

- To create meaningful knowledge exchange opportunities between disabled children and young people, families, practitioners, policy makers and academics and across relevant disciplines and professions;
- To disseminate innovation in research, policy and practice;
- To generate new knowledge and understandings of the lives of looked after disabled children, leading to publishable outputs;
- To identify national and international research collaboration opportunities and develop a sustainable programme of future work;
- To raise the profile of this overlooked, under researched area.

b. Partnership and participation

This programme was developed in partnership with colleagues from the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS), University of Strathclyde, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Action for Children, Active Inquiry and the Scottish Government (see Appendix One for Programme team details).

This programme aimed to share innovative research, policy and practice internationally and nationally. As the original proposal identified, there is a general dearth of research on, with or for looked after disabled children. We were delighted to have the participation of Professor Jan Siska

(Charles University, Czech Republic), Tonje Gunderson (Norwegian Social Research Centre, Norway), as well as Professor Monica Dowling (Open University, UK) who has conducted research

with disabled children living in institutions in Latvia, Bulgaria and the Ukraine. We welcomed the participation of Dr Daniel Scott, Associate Professor and Director of the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, Canada who was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Edinburgh in October 2012.

From across the United Kingdom, we had a very positive response from academics to participate in the *Getting it Right for looked after Disabled Children and Young People* programme. This included Dr Claire Baker (National Care Advisory Service, London), Professor Bryony Beresford (University of York), Dr Anita Franklin (Children's Society), Zoe Picton-Howell (University of Edinburgh) Dr Parvaneh Rabiee (University of Leeds), and Professor Mike Stein (University of York) who had all completed relevant research. We also invited the participation of academics currently conducting relevant research studies; for example, Dr Bernadette Kelly and Dr Sandra Dowling (Queens University, Belfast) shared their new research study which explores the profiles of looked after disabled children using case file audits in Northern Ireland. Speakers also included: Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tam Baillie, and Scottish Government civil servants, Charlie Hogg and Sharon Glen who outlined the current arrangements for reporting national statistics on children's disabilities. The expertise of practitioners working with looked after disabled children across the UK was shared through a 'world café' experience as part of the Being Heard workshop (December 2012).

The meaningful engagement of looked after disabled children and young people was achieved through a fifteen-week forum theatre programme facilitated by Gavin Crichton and Howie Reeve of Active Inquiry. East Park has a long history of providing education and residential care for disabled children. The school and short break service is located in inner city Glasgow, with children living in small purpose built houses in the community. The children who are resident are 'looked after' and have a range of disabilities. The age range of children is from primary age up to school leaving age. Six young people from East Park School in Glasgow participated, as did East Park staff.

In total, 130 people participated in the knowledge exchange events between October 2012 and April 2013. Participants represented a wide range of practitioner roles (health, social work and education), researchers and policy makers. There was a high level of interest in the programme and our original projection of eighty participants over the course of the programme was exceeded. Due to the importance of interaction at these events and a limited budget, we were not able to accommodate every person who requested to attend.

2. Knowledge Exchange Programme

a. Workshop One: Being Counted

Our first workshop explored the prevalence and characteristics of looked after disabled children and young people across the United Kingdom. The presentations and discussion for the Being Counted workshop in October 2012 were guided by three underpinning questions:

1. How many looked after children and young people are disabled and what are their characteristics?
2. How are looked after disabled children and young people theoretically constructed across disciplines?
3. What are the opportunities and barriers to establishing accurate prevalence figures?

The Being Counted workshop

- **The Challenge of Counting and Defining Disabled Children in Care:** Dr Claire Baker, Catch 22's National Care Advisory Service
- **Theorising Disability and its Implications for Looked After Disabled Children:** Professor Nicholas Watson, University of Glasgow (Member of programme team)
- **Researching the Lives of Disabled Children who are Looked After in Northern Ireland: Methodological Challenges and Processes:** Dr Berni Kelly & Dr Sandra Dowling, Queens University, Belfast
- **The Prevalence of Disability among Looked After Children in Scotland:** Sharon Glen and Charlie Hogg, Scottish Government.

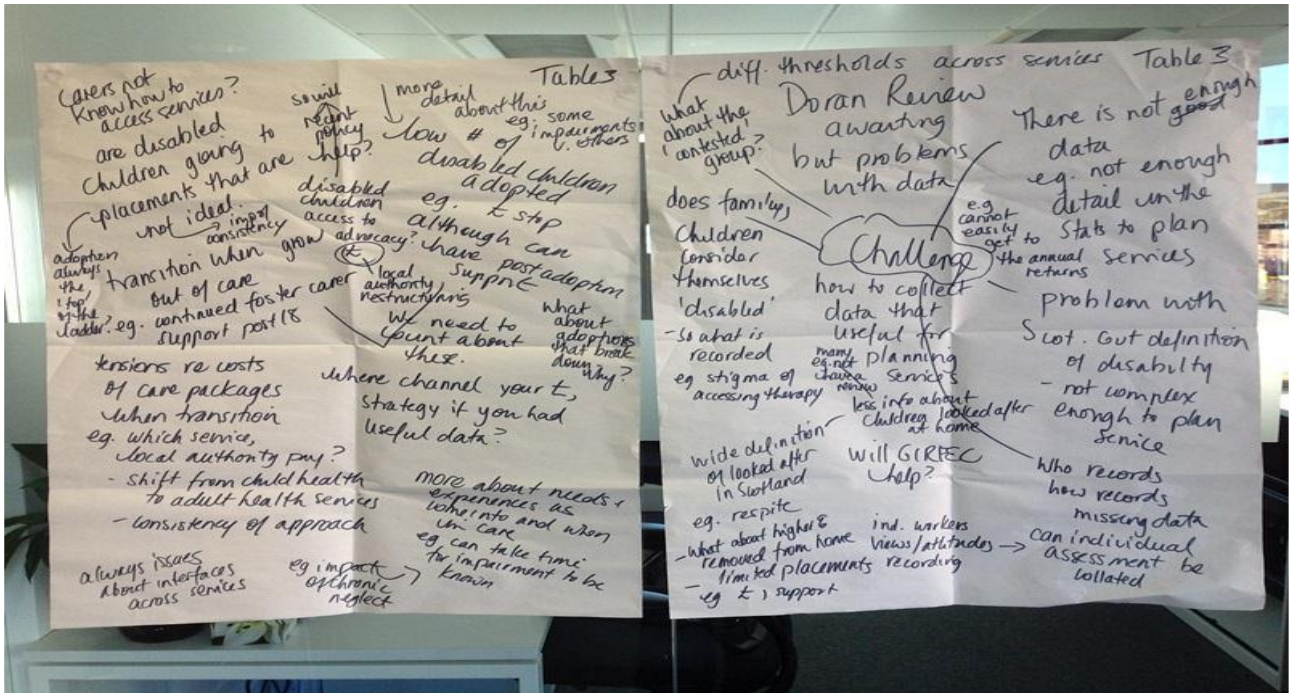
The workshop highlighted the multiple challenges facing agencies in identifying disabled children and young people in the care systems of the United Kingdom. The various structures were discussed and innovative research methods explored as an opportunity to consider how we can improve data collection for this group. There was a general consensus that disabled children and young people remained a hidden group and robust data collection had been given insufficient attention. In response to this workshop, a group led by CELCIS has been established in Scotland to improve data collection for looked after disabled children and young people.

The workshop resulted in greater clarity about current data collection methods for establishing the prevalence of disabled children and young people in care across the United Kingdom. There was considerable learning shared from the seminal research studies that will inform future

research proposals. The lack of attention on this group was highlighted to policy makers and practitioners.

“We can’t plan properly without knowing who we are planning for”
Participant’s reflection at the Being Counted seminar, October 2012

Figure one: Thought shower from one group discussion – Challenges in establishing prevalence



b. Workshop Two: Being Heard

The aim of the Being Heard workshop was to hear what issues mattered to looked after disabled children and to explore approaches seeking the views of disabled children and young people in meaningful ways. The workshop was divided into two main parts: In the morning, we participated in a piece of forum theatre, entitled ‘Alisha’s Surprise’, written and performed by a group of young people. In the afternoon, we ran a ‘world café’ event with a choice of five different workshops to consider how looked after disabled children and young people could be heard and respected. Tam

Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, highlighted the importance of this issue in his opening remarks.

The Being Heard workshop

- 'Alisha's Surprise' A forum theatre piece developed by six children and young people on the topic, Being Heard with Gavin Crichton and Howie Reeve (Active Inquiry)
- Meet Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People: Tam Baillie
- Exploring ways of communicating with children and young people: Facilitated by Professor Kay Tisdall, University of Edinburgh. This involved a choice of 5 workshops:
 - **Libby Welsh – Quarriers – Using communication passports** - Personal Passports were developed by the CALL Centre at Edinburgh University as a way of gathering and presenting information about disabled children and young people in a person-centred way. Quarriers' outlined how they developed this model by using passports as a tool to prepare children for short breaks.
 - **Gavin Crichton and friends – Active Inquiry – Exploring forum theatre** - Forum theatre was developed in South America in the 1960's and 70's. It views the theatre play as a starting point and not an end product. The experience of devising and performing "Alisha's Surprise" as a creative way to raise awareness was explored.
 - **Ashley Ryan – Enable Scotland – Involving young people in responding to the Children and Young People Bill** - Enable Scotland explained how they adapted the material in the Bill to allow children and young people to meaningfully contribute to the consultation
 - **Moyra Hawthorn & Joyce Herriot – Action for Children – Using talking mats** - Using talking mats as an established communication tool the discussion focused on how this can be used in a residential short break service, and for looked after children reviews.
 - **Martin Bailey – Independent consultant – Using Viewpoint** - The findings on the use of Viewpoint - Computer Assisted Self Interview in a pilot child protection study at Hertfordshire County Council was shared. This indicated that it was suitable for protection planning and assisted workers in understanding the world from the child's perspective.

Using Forum Theatre

The theatre and arts based company, Active Inquiry (www.activeinquiry.org.uk) specialises in using Forum Theatre with and for communities. Drawing on the work of Augusto Boal and the 'Theatre of the Oppressed', Forum Theatre enables participants to identify and work towards resolving social issues affecting them through encouraging debate and asking questions so that an audience can learn collectively. Already experienced in working with disabled young people on transitions to adulthood, Gavin Crichton and Howie Reeve of Active Inquiry developed a unique project for this Knowledge Exchange programme. They devised a fifteen-week programme with children and

young people at East Park School, Glasgow. East Park has a long history of providing education and residential care for disabled children. The school and short break service is located in inner city Glasgow, with children living in small purpose built houses in the community. We were very keen to develop a participatory programme of work that was valuable for the young people directly. This was an innovative opportunity to engage creatively with issues that the group identified as being important in their lives.

The children and young people performed 'Alisha's Surprise' to great acclaim. Following the performance, the audience was invited to re-enact parts of play in imagining what could have been done differently. This involved considering the emotions of the different actors and then being supported to change the storyline. Some of the young people involved in the play were part of the groups and helped the audience to 'create different stories' where Alisha started to 'be heard' by adults. Certificates, thank you cards and store vouchers were presented to the young people involved to acknowledge their hard work and time in contributing to the programme.

For the majority of participants, this was their first experience with forum theatre. The feedback highlighted what a powerful learning experience this has been. An awards ceremony was held at East Park School after the event to celebrate the young people's achievements.

Key Action Points:

- To address the powerlessness that some looked after disabled children and young people can feel when excluded from day-to-day decisions;
- To use forum theatre to engage an audience and encourage critical discussion and learning;
- To pursue actively and develop participatory and creative opportunities for our looked after disabled children to express their views and be heard.

"It is important to respect everyone, that's what I learned"

Young person at East Park School

c. Workshop Three: Being Included

The third workshop had a specific focus on the inclusion of looked after disabled children in decision making processes. The rationale for this workshop was the concern that disabled children are unfairly excluded from important decisions about their lives. This may be because of professional viewpoints on capacity, a lack of skills to seek the views of disabled children or an oversight of their entitlement to participate in decision making. There is limited research on this area. We were delighted to have four excellent presentations covering the legal entitlements of looked after disabled children and young people, the inclusion of children with little or no speech, disabled children's participation in child protection processes and the involvement of disabled

careleavers in transition processes. The workshop also involved lively discussion groups to consider the research findings and consider the implications for policy and practice.

The Being Included workshop

- **Setting the Scene: Decision making and communicative rights of looked after disabled children**
Zoe Picton-Howell, PhD student, Edinburgh University and solicitor
- **Including looked after disabled children with little or no speech**
Professor Bryony Beresford, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York
- **Are disabled children and young people involved in child protection services, processes and practices?**
Tonje Gundersen, Researcher, NOVA Research Institute, Oslo
- **How are disabled care leavers involved in transition processes and practices?**
Dr Parvaneh Rabiee, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

“Excellent that children with a disability have a profile”

“I will continue to place highest importance on the inclusion of children and young people in all decisions and processes that affect them”

Participants’ reflections at the Being Included seminar, February 2013

d. Workshop Four: Being Valued

The Being Valued workshop focused on advocacy and action for disabled looked after children and young people. In the final workshop of the series, our aim was to consolidate our learning over the knowledge exchange series drawing on the three previous workshops - Being Counted (prevalence/hidden group), Being Heard (workshop with young people using forum theatre), and Being Included (exploring involvement in decision making - focus on communication). Thus, the final workshop, Being Valued aimed to move the agenda forward to look at what actions we needed to take underpinned by a rights focus.

The Being Valued workshop

- **Care Less Lives: The Story of the Rights Movement of Young People in Care**, Professor Mike Stein, University of York
- **A Children's Rights Perspective: Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Care**, Professor Jan Siska, Charles University, Prague
- **Being Valued: Disabled Children's Right to Advocacy**, Dr Anita Franklin, The Children's Society
- **ACTION GROUPS:** Being Counted, Being Heard and Being Included

We devised three action groups focused on the previous three seminars: Being Counted, Being Heard and Being Included. Following the presentations, the first discussion explored:

Q1: In your experience, how do we value the experiences of looked after disabled children and young people?

Q2: What can we learn from the development of the rights movement for this group?

Q3: What can we learn from an international perspective?

In the afternoon, briefing papers and short podcasts of the previous seminars were viewed (as an important aide memoire) and the groups were encouraged to develop action plans to address:

What actions can we take as individuals, organisations or sectors, to ensure we 'get it right' for looked after disabled children and young people?

Three action plans were developed and future programmes of work discussed and developed.

Figure two: Action plan for Being Included

Being Included

PRACTICE use of

- * Facilitating a range of methods of communication
- * Promotion of Art. 12 of UNCR C among professionals (implications etc.)
- * Also other human rights issues
- * Raising awareness of bullying - help schools to address this with teachers, support staff and children
- * Review GIRFEC / CHILD'S PLAN to ensure specific needs of disabled YP addressed satisfactorily
- * Capitalising on uses of Forum Theatre
- * Children's Hearings
- * Pathway Planning

RESEARCH | KE

- * Gather the knowledge of older disabled care leavers and use this to reframe transition experience of current disabled care leavers
- * Need for ~~current~~ research of current experiences of disabled YP + care leavers
- * How disabled YP express themselves at children's hearings (piggyback on Children's Hearings Act 2011)

POLICY

- * Petition Scottish Parliament to promote UNCR C.
- * Ensure the rights of disabled looked after children are included in priorities of advocacy orgs. (Who cares? etc.)
- * Amendment to C+YP Bill to highlight disability or influence guidance and regulation
- * To what extent does 'who cares?' Scotland advocate on behalf of disabled Y.P.?

3. Main Outputs and Impact

a. Commitment to action

This knowledge exchange programme provided a springboard for further work in this area. Firstly, hosting this event led to greater recognition of the rights and needs of looked after disabled children by national policy makers across the United Kingdom. Secondly, this series has provided the impetus to develop research proposals to address the needs of this group. Thirdly, the event will have implications for practice, especially with regard to meaningful involvement of looked after disabled children and young people in decision making.

The following activities have now been developed to progress action by organisations:

- Being Counted Data collection working group being set up (led by CELCIS and Scottish Government);
- Commitment to develop funded research proposals on looked after disabled children and young people;
- Scottish Research Association (SRA) seminar held on the use of forum theatre in social research (May 2013). The event was attended by around 30 delegates from a wide range of research sectors in Scotland. It demonstrated how Forum Theatre had been used in the Being Heard seminar, to gather information from an otherwise excluded group, make a meaningful connection to the 'audience' and promote lasting change;
- Inclusion of knowledge exchange series findings included in University of Strathclyde, University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh teaching courses;
- Being Counted journal article developed amongst participating academics;
- Programme team members to progress areas of action as identified as relevant;
- Professor Monica Dowling (Social work, Open University) has requested permission to include seminar of materials in the OU's social work course programme;
- Commitment to poster display at CELCIS conference 2013 and symposium/work stream on disability at CELCIS conference (Autumn 2014);
- Database of all participants and interested individuals established;
- Added value provided by the podcasts which will act as a legacy for the seminar series;
- Participants were invited to complete 'commitment cards'. CELCIS will use these to monitor the progress of actions (see below). Participants at three of the events were invited to share their personal commitments to action. Due to an underspend in our allocated budget, we intend to use 5 days of a Research assistant's time to follow up on 'commitment statements' over 2013 (£1885).

Being Heard Commitments

- Tomorrow I will do something to show respect to a child
- As a Panel Member, I'm committed to ensuring I always access the views of the child – now aware of a range of practice tools for this purpose
- I will make sure the methods people are using well to support the voices of children and young people with disabilities to be heard and respected are featured on our new participation section of the Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP) website
- Explore whether Viewpoint can be adapted to assist disabled children in the Child Protection system
- To promote the interests of looked after disabled care leavers more prominently
- To work at ways of listening to young people with no formal communication methods
- Great insight, experience and knowledge of thinking about how looked after children AND children with disabilities engage in decision making – will apply to studies.
- I will engage more with Scottish Parliament to better understand their processes
- Greater involvement of children through advance preparation
- Will take forward the development of communication/personal passports
- Will tell everyone I meet all about this and disseminate knowledge further. Push to develop our foster carer training to include disability carers.
- Explore Forum Theatre as form of engagement. Use Communication Passport in project and Talking Mats – go on training.

Being Included Commitments

- To offer specialist disability transition services access to Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF) services directly – to contact them directly and to include resources on our website under a specific heading (to ensure practice and protocols are shared by practitioners across LAs).
- Continue to try to raise profile of looked after children with disabilities in LACSIG and Care Planning. Improve data available. Get partners involved to improve services – share policies and practices across local authorities.
- Find out whether disabled children are 'hidden' in the Hearings system – further Article 12 in Scotland via possible Masters in Law/research
- To take back to my team the possibility of identifying advocates for our children in relation to gathering their views. Time and resources currently prevent us from doing this effectively.
- Disseminate learning to team within Social Work. Look at Pathway Planning in relation to disability – why do we use different transition systems and where could we share practice? How do we choose which route to follow for looked after disabled children?
- Refer to research and findings to support my arguments for change.

- When writing about and speaking about looked after children I will remember to refer to disability and the particular needs of disabled looked after children and need to listen to children.
- Continue to promote understanding and awareness of Article 12 – particularly amongst some health care practitioners re Zoe’s point about UNCRC is law and is enforceable.
- I commit to continue with the implementation of Self-Directed Support within Glasgow. This is transformational change which will hopefully impact on improving positive outcomes for young people and their families
- I will ensure that information on Article 12 of UNCRC and the fact that it can be used in legal proceedings is promoted by the Ministerial Working Group
- To ensure (by supporting, informing and engaging) foster carers are aware and confident in supporting children and young people, in particular a greater awareness of rights.
- Talk about and action promotion of training for foster carers on the law, rights and support needs for looked after disabled children and young people. Work harder on getting disability as part of our careleavers work.
- I will continue to place highest importance on the inclusion of children and young people in all decisions and processes that affect them and to scrutinise legislation and policy to ensure that they are conducive to that.
- Take learning from today back to my team and especially Article 12.
- Fully trying to engage young people in any discussions made about them using tools discussed.
- To feedback to team what knowledge I have gained today – pass on and share good practice heard about today.
- Look TO POSSIBLY Training Day/Seminar on involving non-verbal children and young people in research.

Being Valued Commitments

- Promote training in use of aids to help disabled young people express their needs
- Keen to help with linking health data to other data to assist with appropriate data collection about children with disability. Development of training for health professionals on rights of the child and effectiveness of health professionals of its use.
- Work with the Scottish Government to improve statistics. Engage with Scottish Children’s Reporters Association (SCRA) to discuss potential collaborative research. Discuss with Who Cares? Scotland extent to which they advocate for disabled looked after young people
- To make a link from Scottish Government GIRFEC / wellbeing website to CELCIS website.
- Continue to promote the importance of having regard to C&YPs views amongst parents, carers and professionals in all our dealings so that they child’s views are at the centre (Surely if both groups were trying to ensure this happened they would meet in the middle).
- I will prioritise within my research looking at the needs and experiences of looked after children and young people. For too long research on Looked after children has ignored

disability, and disability research has ignored the needs of disabled Looked after Children. It is important that we continue to promote the rights of disabled C&YP and especially those looked after to have their views and opinions heard. I will continue to research this issue.

- To share practice, learning and methods of inclusive communication to organisations

Further success:

- East Park school and Active Inquiry were presented with an 'Innovative practice award' for Alisha's Surprise at the SIRCC Celebrating Success conference (June 2013);
- A further knowledge exchange bid was developed, *Achieving Permanence: Tackling barriers and identifying solutions for disabled children and young people in foster care* (Partnership with The Fostering Network and Quarriers, funded by the University of Strathclyde, May – December 2013).
- This second knowledge exchange programme has already led to arrangements for a group of researchers, practitioners and foster carers to develop one or more research proposals around disabled children in foster care. Work due to start in August 2013.

b. Podcasts and Blog

To support the wider knowledge exchange agenda, podcasts were produced for all four seminars. These included key messages from each speaker, documentation of the workshop and reflections from participants. All podcasts are available on the SUII, CELCIS and Scottish Government websites. Maggie Vai from the University of Edinburgh also created a blog for each seminar hosted on the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships website (<http://crfrblog.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/disability>).

Podcasts

Being Counted – 24 Oct 2012 <https://vimeo.com/53776831>

In this workshop we considered: How are looked after disabled children theoretically constructed across disciplines? What are our current methods for establishing the numbers and characteristics of looked after disabled children across the UK? What are the opportunities and barriers in establishing accurate prevalence figures?

Being Heard – 5 Dec 2012 <https://vimeo.com/56912232>

Working with Active Inquiry, this workshop used forum theatre to explore what matters to looked after disabled children. This provided an innovative opportunity to engage creatively with issues children and young people identified as being important to them.

Being Included – 6 February 2013 <https://vimeo.com/59559021>

We considered how the views of children and young people are heard in decision making processes and looked specifically at the communication rights of looked after disabled children

and young people.

Being Valued – 17 April 2013 <https://vimeo.com/65330135>

We explored the rights movement in relation to looked after disabled children and young people with a specific focus on the provision of advocacy for this group. We began to develop a programme of action to ensure this group of children and young people are valued.

c. Publications

As part of our commitment to dissemination, two articles have been published to disseminate the learning from the seminar series. The first article, Time to Listen was published in the *Children in Scotland* magazine that is widely disseminated to those working with children and young people across Scotland (January 2013). The second article, Being Heard: Alisha's Surprise was published in *Speak Out!* magazine published by Who Cares? Scotland (February 2013). The seminar series was also highlighted in *Holyrood Magazine* in a feature about the Scottish Universities Insight Institute's Director, Professor Charlie Woods. An academic journal article on prevalence of looked after disabled children is in final stages of development (due to be submitted to the British Journal of Social Work in July 2013).

Making time to be heard

Lynn Gilmour meets one arts company working to raise awareness about the significant number of disabled looked after children and young people in Scotland

For six children and young people from East Park School in Glasgow, Wednesday 5 December 2012 was a significant date. It marked the culmination of three months of intensive work, and performance of 'Alisha's Surprise', the play that they had written and directed to highlight some of the issues facing looked after disabled children and young people in Scotland.

There are around 16,000 looked after children in Scotland and, although data is limited, it is estimated that at least 7-11% are disabled. However, looked after disabled children often constitute a hidden group in research, policy and practice. So, the group from East Park worked with arts based company Active Inquiry over a fifteen-week period to develop a unique Forum Theatre experience on the topic, 'Being Heard'. The play had its debut performance at The Lighthouse in Glasgow, in front of an invited audience of fifty academics, policy makers, managers and practitioners from across Scotland, and was also subsequently performed for families and staff at East Park.

'Alisha's Surprise'

Created as a fictional story by the group, 'Alisha's Surprise' comprises five scenes, starting on Alisha's 15th birthday, which takes place in a children's home where Alisha has lived since she was 10. Alisha is treated to a surprise party and tickets for a trip to London and a JLS concert! But Alisha's excitement soon turns to disappointment and annoyance when plans to go dancing after a trip to McDonalds are suddenly changed because a staff member is ill, and Alisha is then told that she must give another young person a turn on the Wii. The following day

Alisha's parents arrive to take her out for tea with her boyfriend Jimmy and on hearing about the incident the night before, they force Alisha to apologise to her key worker. The group go out for tea but are not able to go to the cinema because a meeting with Alisha's social worker takes precedence and she has to return to the children's home. At the meeting with her social worker, Alisha does not want to talk as she is still angry at missing the film. She is told that if she does not behave she might not be allowed to go on her London trip. The play ends with Alisha upset and frustrated at the unfairness of the situation. Why has nobody taken the time to listen to her?

The play was performed enthusiastically and with conviction by the young people and staff involved, and was hailed a success by the audience. The innovative use of forum theatre then allowed the audience to actively engage with the issues that the children and young people had raised, by encouraging critical discussion and collective learning. Under the facilitation of Gavin Crichton from Active Inquiry and with the help of some of the young actors, audience members had the opportunity to re-enact the scenes to explore the feelings of the characters and create alternative storylines where Alisha was listened to in the different scenarios. The experience highlighted the powerlessness some children and young people can feel when excluded from day-to-day decisions about their lives. The issues raised will continue to inform the programme, and future opportunities to develop participatory and creative opportunities for looked after disabled children and young people to express their views and experiences are being actively pursued.

Funded by the Scottish Universities' Insight Institute, this innovative knowledge exchange programme, *Getting it Right for Looked After Disabled Children and Young People* aims to explore and understand the experiences of looked after disabled children and young people in research, policy and practice arenas, in order to inform and encourage change. A series of thematic workshops has been developed: *Being Counted* (October 2012), *Being Heard* (December 2012), *Being Included* (February 2013) and *Being Valued* (April 2013) to bring together academics, policy makers, service practitioners, third sector organisations, service user organisations to discuss and debate the key issues. The multi-disciplinary programme team includes academics, policy makers and practitioners based at the University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Strathclyde, Action for Children, Active Inquiry and the Scottish Government.

For further information about the programme, please contact Dr Louise Hill at the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS), University of Strathclyde (Louise.Hill@strath.ac.uk). Podcasts are available for each workshop with highlights and reflections from delegates, as well as electronic copies of presentations (where available) on the Scottish Universities' Insight Institute website (www.scottishinsight.ac.uk). You can also join the discussion on the blog at www.crfblog.blogspot.co.uk. For more information on using Forum theatre, see <http://www.activeinquiry.co.uk/>

The programme team would like to thank all the children, young people and staff at East Park school who made this event such a success.



Being Heard:

Alisha's Surprise

In December 2012, six young people from the Dream Team drama group at Eastpark School performed Alisha's Surprise. It was a brilliant performance! Working with Active Inquiry (a theatre arts company), the Dream Team were given the opportunity, over fifteen weeks, to write and perform a play as part of a series of work called Getting it Right for Looked After Disabled Children and Young People. The play was applauded as a great success by the fifty people at the event in the Glasgow Lighthouse, as well as the young people and staff at Eastpark School. The play showed us how we can all make small changes to what we do to ensure children and young people's voices are heard and acted upon.

Alisha's Surprise was about the plans that were made for Alisha's fifteenth birthday including a surprise party, going to the dancing and a trip to London to see JLS in concert. Alisha (played by Elizabeth) is delighted with her surprise party but her happiness

soon turns to disappointment when she is told that she cannot go to the dancing with her friend Charlotte as a member of staff has phoned in sick. The next day, things go from bad to worse for Alisha when her trip to see Skyfall with her parents and her boyfriend Jimmy (played by Liam) is cancelled as she has to go to a meeting with her Social Worker! Alisha's parents grudgingly bring her home for the meeting but, unsurprisingly, Alisha is not feeling like taking part. The staff tell her to behave as she has the JLS concert coming up. By this stage Alisha has had enough and uses the only power she has left, by refusing to go to the concert – as Elizabeth puts it 'Alisha couldn't do what she wanted and she was getting angry'.

Following the play, Gavin from Active Inquiry asked everyone to work in groups to show snapshots from the play. Gavin then asked each group to make three changes to their scene to improve things for Alisha. This showed us that some very simple changes could have avoided Alisha becoming so upset. As Liam puts it 'It is important to respect everyone - that's what I learned' and, as Jordan says, 'no one was listening to Alisha'.

The aim of this series of work is to bring different people together - researchers, government, workers and



The dream Team drama group in action



Alisha not being listened to young people - to raise the profile of looked after disabled young people and create and spread new knowledge and understandings.

A big Thank You to the Dream Team of Elizabeth, Jordon, Liam, Caitlin, Gavin, and Cameron for their fantastic work! Thank you to Gavin and Howie at Active Inquiry and all the staff at Eastpark School. It was a great day of achievement for everybody involved.

If you're interested in becoming involved in drama you might like to contact Promote Youth Theatre Scotland? You can find your local branch at:

www.promoteyt.co.uk



4. Conclusion

This has been an innovative and collaborative knowledge exchange series that has generated considerable interest across research, policy and practice. The programme has clearly identified that looked after disabled children and young people have remained hidden and we now welcome the opportunity to build on this programme of work to ensure that all looked after disabled children and young people are fully recognized in the future. This is the beginning of a programme of work that we know will make an important contribution in recognising the rights of this group of children and young people.

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Appendix One

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