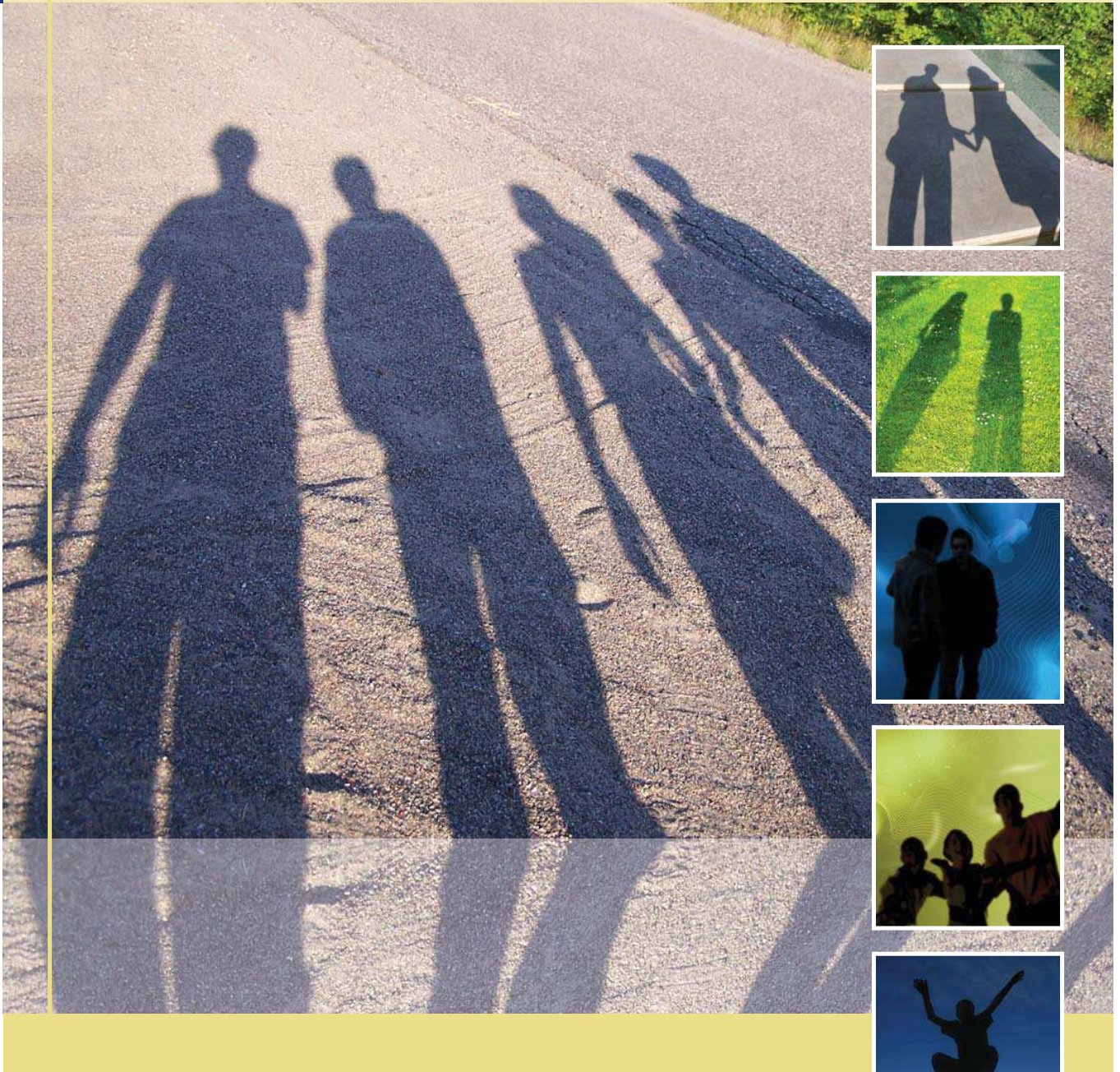


Making the difference ... Putting the care back into corporate parenting

A practical guide for local authorities as corporate parents



Rainer

? what makes the
difference
Project for children in care and care leavers

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Making the difference ...

Putting the care back into corporate parenting



A practical guide for local authorities as corporate parents, based on the experiences of children and young people in care

Introduction

Where we are now

Since late 2005, the What Makes the Difference? Project (WMTD) has worked in partnership with local authorities and other organisations to examine what works in service provision for care leavers. We have piloted new approaches to empower young people and to support and prepare them in education training and employment and in making the transition to adult life. Our learning has been shared across the UK and in the European Union.

The research we undertook and the independent evaluation of our work, together with the knowledge and learning accumulated from other research and, most importantly, from the experiences of young people, professionals and carers, has led us to this guide for local authorities, “Making the difference ... Putting the care back into corporate parenting.”

Our guide offers a model and principles of good corporate parenting from the unique perspective of children and young people which, by balancing the ‘corporate’ with children’s need for ‘parenting’ in the system, seeks to improve their everyday lives in care and their journey to independence. The guide encompasses all the learning from our work and includes the messages that children and young people have shared with us. Finally, it provides a framework for developing the ‘corporate’ Pledge, required by the government’s Care Matters white paper¹ – the key to an empowered structure.

How we got here

Children and young people in and leaving care have been subject to a range of legislation and initiatives. The Children Act 1989,² The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000,³ the Quality Protects⁴ programme and The Children Act 2004⁵ have all attempted to address and redress the inequalities of outcome that have affected children and young people in and leaving care over time. Despite the efforts made and honourable intentions of these initiatives, and others aimed at *all* young people, the anticipated “rising tide” effect failed to materialise – children in care and care leavers were still left behind while their peers began to progress quickly. Even the advent of Children’s Trusts and the merging of education and social care departments in local authorities has so far failed to resolve the issues of low educational attainment and the very poor levels of participation in education, training or employment after the age of sixteen.

In 2006, the Government recharged their efforts to tackle the lack of educational attainment and other poor outcomes in children in care and care leavers. For too long, this particularly vulnerable group, supposedly parented by the state, had in fact been failed. The green paper ‘Care Matters’⁶ was launched, and the government began a process of consultation with young people and professionals on a range of new proposals designed to do more to improve outcomes. The green paper addressed issues as varied as extra financial support to shore up

learning, a proposal for local authorities to develop a Pledge to provide their care and support to their children, and enabling young people to stay in foster care for longer.

In June 2007, after the consultation period (during which WMTD ran four events for young people to discuss and share their views⁷), the Government published its wide-ranging white paper, *Care Matters: Time for Change*.⁸ Many of the proposals in the original green paper persisted and there were some new ideas to support the health of young people in care, but at the core of the document there was a philosophy, an explicit recognition of the role and responsibilities of the corporate parent and a move towards a more 'normative' approach to parenting, giving children in care the support and care that children in the wider community expect and receive from their parents.

At the time of writing the Children and Young People's Bill is passing through parliament and the secondary legislation and guidance is expected soon, but there is no doubt that the white paper and the bill amount to a change in the philosophy underpinning the care of the state's children and young people.

The WMTD process has taught us a number of very straightforward lessons about good practice but it has also enabled us to develop a new theoretical model of corporate parenting or just 'straightforward' parenting for children in and leaving care. The quality of relationships that young people have with their carers and the professionals closest to them are crucial to their success whilst in and leaving care. The findings of our work, the results of our pilots, our work with young people and professionals, the expertise of old-hands in the leaving care world and the wealth of academic research all adds up to the same few messages young people have told us over and over again. They reflect their need for good relationships that provide care and love, for stability and continuity in the home and in learning, the need to be listened to and involved in decision-making – the need to feel parented and normal, like other children.

We learned that if you provide individual tuition to a young person who is struggling at school or college their learning will improve.⁹ If you prepare young people more effectively for leaving care, they can survive the process more easily. If children inhabit a world in which the 'corporate' parent, their carers, lead professionals and teachers harbour high expectations for their success, their outcomes will improve.¹⁰ If you struggle to engage young people in education and employment, creativity will always get you out of a hole. If you put the young person at the centre, you will provide them with the skills, experience and confidence they need to help them succeed.

Our model of good parenting encompasses all of these ideas and attempts to shed some light on how we fill the parenting gap for children in and leaving care. It is an empowered model of care in which the child or young person is at the heart of the process, supported by their carers and lead professional, who in turn are empowered by a structure that trusts the closest responsible adults to be the parent on behalf of the local authority 'corporate' body.

We hope you find the guide useful, and remember, there is a wealth of other useful information, tools and practice examples at <http://www.leavingcare.org/professionals/home/>

References and notes

- 1 DfES (2006) *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.
- 2 HMSO (1989) *Children Act 1989 (c.41)*. London: HMSO.
- 3 *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000*. London: The Stationery Office.
- 4 Department of Health (1999) *Quality Protects – Transforming Children's Services: The Government's Objectives for Children's Social Services*. London: Department of Health.
- 5 *Children Act 2004*. London: The Stationery Office.
- 6 See 1.
- 7 WMTD/ Rainer (2007) *Care Matters Consultation Report*. London: WMTD Rainer.
- 8 Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Care Matters: Time for Change*. London: The Stationery Office.
- 9 National Children's Bureau (2007) *WMTD Project evaluation of education support for young people in local authority care*. London: NCB & WMTD.
- 10 See 8.

Contents of this Guide

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRINCIPLES OF GOOD CORPORATE PARENTING

An aide memoire to guide local authorities, developed from our model of parenting and messages from young people in care (see *Booklet 2*).

BOOKLET 1

What young people say about their experiences of being parented in the care system

This booklet aims to give a taste of the experience of life in care from the perspective of young people, based on information from our peer research, service evaluations and other recent studies, together with contributions from young people in informal discussion groups and national consultation events on the government's Care Matters green paper.

BOOKLET 2

What young people say about good parenting – model and principles

The aim of this booklet is to show what children need to grow into happy, healthy and productive young adults, based on child development theory and parent-child research. Using this, it sets out a framework for good parenting within the Every Child Matters outcomes, backed by the perspectives of young people with and without experience of care. From this, we offer a set of principles to guide local authorities, as corporate parents, to help improve how they parent 'their' children and young people and ultimately improve outcomes.

BOOKLET 3

Putting children first – what good corporate parents can do to make a difference

This booklet contains case stories using our model and principles of good corporate parenting developed in Booklet 2, and inspired by young people's real accounts of their experiences in care. The case stories aim to illustrate aspects of good practice, and show how good corporate parents can support children's and young people's carers and lead professions to meet the gap in their everyday need for parenting. Real examples of good practice in local authorities and other useful tools and resources are also included.

BOOKLET 4

Developing your Pledge to children and young people – a first step towards good corporate parenting

This booklet describes how children and young people in care can be involved to develop the local authority Pledge on their entitlement to services. It provides a framework and tools for developing a pledge, informed by our model and principles of good corporate parenting and young people's feedback, focusing on the specific needs of the local care population, using a real example of how this process has worked in practice.

APPENDIX

Rainer 'What Makes the Difference? Project' (2008)
Project messages on support for care leavers in empowerment, education, training and employment and preparation and planning for transition to adulthood.

London: Rainer WMTD.

Rainer WMTD/National Children's Bureau (2007)
What Makes The Difference? Peer Research Study on the Views of Care Leavers in England: Executive Summary.

London: Rainer WMTD/NCB.

Rainer WMTD (2007)
Interviews with young people on their views of being parented in the care system.

London: Rainer WMTD.

DVD – A film made by young people is also included, which gives an insight into their experiences of care and the issues important to them in their own words, mirroring the themes and issues covered in the booklets.

These and other WMTD publications can also be downloaded at <http://www.leavingcare.org/professionals/products>

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