

Press Release

Tuesday 20th November 2018

Stigma still exists for children in care

A new ScotCen Panel attitudes survey has revealed that, while attitudes in Scotland to care experienced young people are generally very positive, some people still hold discriminatory attitudes.

The survey, commissioned by the Life Changes Trust and carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen), reports positively that the majority of people in Scotland feel that being in care 'makes no difference' to whether children behave well or badly (72%), or whether they are a good or bad influence on others (88%).

A majority also feel that being in care 'makes no difference' to whether a young person is more or less likely to get into trouble with the police (64%), or whether they make a good parent or not (83%).

However, over a third (35%) of people in Scotland do believe that children in care are more likely to get into trouble with the police and around a quarter (24%) believe that children in care are worse behaved than other children.

And while most people believe that ending up in care is not the fault of the child, a significant minority - 4 in 10 (42%) - think it is likely children are in care 'because the parents can't cope with their child's behaviour'.

Heather Coady, Director of the Life Changes Trust Care Experienced Young People programme said: "When it comes to care experienced young people, there is a significant gap between public understanding and reality.

“We know that children and young people become involved with the care system when their parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection. Poverty, social exclusion, chronic unemployment, poor housing, and lack of community resources make it more likely that a family will come into contact with the care system. That’s the reality. But people often believe that children become involved in the care system because they are bad, or because of something they did. In fact, 88% of looked-after young people in Scotland entered the care system on care and protection grounds.

“It’s important that we recognise these gaps, because what the public thinks and feels about the care system and the young people who experience it matters hugely. Changes to policy and practice need public support to deliver lasting transformation.”

According to the research, around 6 in 10 (58%) people in Scotland know someone who has been in care, or have been in care themselves. Around a quarter (26%) of people have a friend who has been in care and 1 in 10 (10%) have a family member who has been in care.

This research is the first in Scotland to explore public attitudes to care experienced young people and it raises questions about the balance between people’s knowledge of the challenges that face care experienced young people and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

This survey highlighted the following:

Knowledge

- Around 6 in 10 (58%) people in Scotland know someone who has been in care, or have experience of being in care themselves.
- Around a quarter (26%) of people in Scotland have a friend who has been in care.
- Around 1 in 10 have a job that involves working with people in care (12%) or have a colleague (11%) or a family member (10%) who has been in care.
- One in ten (10%) reported knowing ‘someone else’ who had been in care.

Opinions on why young people end up in care

- The most common perception of why children are in care is 'because their parents are addicted to alcohol or drugs', with over 7 in 10 (73%) believing this is a likely reason.
- Over half (54%) think it is likely that children are in care 'because there is not enough government support for families'
- 4 in 10 (42%) think it is likely children are in care 'because the parents can't cope with their child's behaviour'.
- People on the left of the political spectrum, in the lowest income group, and those living in the most deprived areas are the most likely to believe that 'children are in care because there's not enough government support for families'.

Attitudes towards care experienced young people

- The majority of people in Scotland feel that being in care 'makes no difference' to whether children behave well or badly (72%), or whether they are a good or bad influence on others (88%).
- A majority also feel that being in care 'makes no difference' to whether they are more or less likely to get into trouble with the police (64%), or whether they make a good parent or not (83%).
- However, over a third (35%) of people in Scotland do believe that children in care are more likely to get into trouble with the police and around a quarter (24%) believe that children in care are worse behaved than other children.

Attitudes to forming relationships with care experienced young people

The majority of people (68%) feel happy for their children to form a friendship with care experienced young people (with around a quarter saying they would be neither be happy or unhappy).

- Similarly, almost 8 in 10 (79%) say that they would be happy if a close relative 'married or formed a long-term relationship' with someone who had spent most of their childhood in foster care.

- However, a smaller proportion (71%) say that they would be happy for a close relative of theirs to marry or form a long-term relationship with someone who has spent most of their childhood in a residential home.

The survey drew the following conclusions:

- While the majority of people in Scotland do not have negative views on care experienced young people, a significant minority do hold attitudes that might be deemed to be discriminatory or stigmatising.
- Negative attitudes can influence how people behave towards, or make decisions about, care experienced young people and adults. Such negative attitudes need to be challenged if people with care experience are going to be able to lead fulfilling lives free from stigma and discrimination.

Heather Coady added "Right now, the story people tell of care experienced people isn't one of success. But it's time we stopped looking at the negative and started to concentrate on the positive. Care experienced young people are just as likely to be talented, articulate, intelligent and full of potential as other young people, they may just need extra support to fulfil that potential. So it's very important that we challenge negative stereotypes and instead look at ways to provide that extra support and to believe in young people. These issues need to stay on the public and political agenda so that we can create the best life possible for care experienced young people."

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Life Changes Trust was established by the Big Lottery in April 2013 with a ten year endowment of £50 million to support transformational improvements in the quality of life, well-being, empowerment and inclusion of people affected by dementia and young people with experience of being in care.

The **ScotCen Panel** is a research project following around 2,500 people living in Scotland. The ScotCen Panel is run alongside the NatCen Panel, which was established in 2015 by the National Centre for Social Research. Together the Panels support the work of government departments and non-profit organisations such as charities, local authorities and universities.